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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Dr. Hance Dilbeck, senior pastor of Quail Springs Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, OK.

We are very happy to welcome him here.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O Lord, You made Heaven and Earth and all that dwell therein. We praise You as our Creator. You rule above men and nations as the King of Glory, and we praise You as our King.

Father, we bow before You humbly because we believe that You judge men and nations, and we praise You as our judge, and we delight this morning that Jesus teaches us to call You our Father.

And, Father, we give You thanks for the freedom that we have in this Nation. We thank You for those who fight and serve to protect those freedoms. We thank You for the men and women who serve here in this Chamber. We ask that You give them wisdom, that You guide their decisions.

We pray, Father, that You give us grace as a nation and that You give the men and women in this Senate grace to seek justice and love mercy and to walk humbly with You.

In Christ's Name we pray. 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.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, one of the Senate's very first acts this Congress was to pass the legislative tools necessary to repeal ObamaCare. We did so because the American people, who had suffered for years under the failures of ObamaCare, were calling out for relief.

Everyone knows about ObamaCare's skyrocketing costs and its plummeting choices. Too often, however, this discussion seems to veer into the abstract. These are not just numbers on a page. These are the lives of real people. These are the men and women we represent, Americans who are hurting, middle-class families who deserve better than ObamaCare's failures. We worked hard to provide them with a better way. We did so in the knowledge that this task would not be easy. We understood it would not come quickly. But we knew it was the right thing to do, so we pushed forward anyway. I believe we must continue to push forward now.

I regret that the effort to repeal and immediately replace the failures of ObamaCare will not be successful. That doesn't mean we should give up. We will now try a different way to bring the American people relief from ObamaCare. I think we owe them at least that much.

In the coming days, the Senate will take up and vote on a repeal of ObamaCare combined with a stable 2-year transition period as we work toward patient-centered healthcare. A majority of the Senate voted to pass the same repeal legislation back in 2015. President Obama vetoed it then; President Trump will sign it now.

I imagine many Democrats were celebrating last night. I hope they consider

what they are celebrating. The American people are hurting, they need relief, and it is regretful that our Democratic colleagues decided early on that they did not want to engage with us seriously in the process to deliver that relief.

But this doesn't have to be the end of the story. Passing the repeal legislation will allow us to accomplish what we need to do on behalf of our people. Our Democratic friends have spoken a lot recently about wanting bipartisan solutions. Passing this legislation will provide the opportunity for Senators of all parties to engage with a fresh start and a new beginning for the American people.

Mr. President, 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. 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.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night we learned that the current Republican healthcare bill lacks enough support to even reach the floor of the Senate. After numerous delays, false starts, false predictions, and two pulled votes, it should be crystal clear to everyone on the other side of the aisle that the core of the bill is unworkable.

It is time to move on. It is time to start over. Rather than repeating the same failed partisan process yet again, Republicans should work with Democrats on a bill that lowers premiums,

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



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provides long-term stability to the markets, and improves our healthcare system.

I heard the Republican leader this morning say that Democrats “decided early on that they did not want to engage seriously” on healthcare. In the same speech, the Republican leader also admitted that the very first thing the Republican majority did this Congress was to pass reconciliation so they could pass healthcare on a party-line vote—50 needed, no Democrats needed. Early on, the majority leader told Democrats: We don’t need you. We don’t want you.

Respectfully, I take issue with the idea that Democrats didn’t want to engage on healthcare. The majority leader admitted that he decided the matter for us when he locked Democrats out of the process at the outset. At the very beginning of this Congress, President Trump and Leader MCCONNELL said: Don’t come knocking on our door on healthcare. We don’t need you.

Now that their one-party effort has largely failed, we hope they will change their tune.

It seems like many Republicans are ready for a truly bipartisan effort on healthcare, indeed. My friend Senator MCCAIN has urged it quite strongly saying: “The Congress must now return to regular order, hold hearings, [and] receive input from members of both parties.” He said that while recuperating in Arizona. So that is how strongly he feels about it.

Other Republican Senators have made similar comments, but the Republican leader still plans to ignore their advice and instead plans on holding a proxy vote on a straight repeal of our healthcare law first.

Make no mistake about it. Passing repeal without a replacement would be a disaster. Our healthcare system would implode. Millions would lose coverage. Coverage for millions more would be diminished. Our healthcare system would be in such a deep hole that repair would be nearly impossible.

In fact, passing repeal and having it go into effect 2 years later is, in many ways, worse than the Republican healthcare bill that was just rejected by my Republican colleagues. It is as if our healthcare system were a patient who came in and needed some medicine and the Republicans propose surgery. The operation was a failure. Now Republicans are proposing a second surgery that will surely kill the patient. Medicine is needed—bipartisan medicine, not a second surgery.

We urge our Republican colleagues to change their tune. Passing repeal now is not a door to bipartisan solutions, as the majority leader suggested this morning. Rather, it is a disaster. The door to bipartisanship is open right now, not with repeal but with an effort to improve the existing system. The door is open right now. Republican leadership only needs to walk through it, as many Republican Members are urging.

The door is to accept the progress we have made in our healthcare system and work to improve it. The Affordable Care Act isn’t perfect, but repealing all of the good things about the law will create such chaos that there will hardly be anything left to repair.

Republicans don’t need to wreak havoc on our healthcare system first in order to get Democrats to the table. We are ready to sit down right now, if Republicans abandon cuts to Medicaid, abandon huge tax breaks for the wealthy, and agree to go through the regular order—through the committees, with hearings, and onto the floor with time for amendments. That is how we perfect legislation here. That is how it has been done for 200 years.

Almost inevitably, when you try to draft something behind closed doors and do not vet it with the public, it becomes a failure—in this case, a disaster. So again our Republican colleagues don’t need to wreak havoc on our healthcare system first in order to get Democrats to the table. We are ready to sit down right now, again, if Republicans abandon cuts to Medicaid, abandon tax breaks for the wealthy, and agree to go through the regular order. The door to bipartisanship is open right now. Republicans only need to walk through it.

I would remind my Republican friends that the CBO has already scored the idea of a clean repeal bill, and it would be a catastrophe. Listen to what the nonpartisan CBO said. The head of CBO is appointed by the Republican leader of the Senate and the Republican leader of the House. Here is what CBO said about repeal: It would cause 32 million Americans to lose their insurance. Premiums would double, while cutting taxes for households with incomes over a million dollars by over \$50,000 a year. It would end Medicaid expansion with no grace period or option for States that like their Medicaid expansion and want to keep it. In many ways, it is just as cruel, if not crueler, to Medicaid as the TrumpCare bill, but in a different way.

So I would expect that the same Senators who are concerned about the TrumpCare bill’s Medicaid cuts will be equally concerned about what repeal and delay would do to Medicaid. Many of my Republican friends rejected roundly the idea of repeal and delay several months ago at the beginning of the year when President Trump first proposed it and it seemed like that was really what Republicans would do. Here are just some of the names back then who said repeal and then replace later doesn’t work: CASSIDY, ALEXANDER, COLLINS, CORKER, COTTON, HATCH, ISAKSON, MORAN, MCCAIN, MURKOWSKI, PAUL.

Well, I would tell those colleagues and all of the others: The idea hasn’t magically gotten better with age. It is still nothing more than a cut-and-run approach to healthcare that will leave millions of Americans out in the cold and will raise costs on everyone—the

young, the old, the sick, the healthy, working Americans, and middle-class families. Everyone will be hurt but the very, very wealthy.

Every day that Republicans spend on trying to pass their now failed partisan TrumpCare bill, every day they spend cooking up new tricks to bully their Members to get on a healthcare bill is another day wasted, another day that could have been spent working on real improvements to our healthcare system.

Democrats want to work with our colleagues on the Republican side to stabilize the marketplaces and improve the cost and quality of care, and we want to do it via regular order, a process this body has used time and again to produce consensus, bipartisan, historic legislation.

The majority leader said in 2014, in a speech entitled “Restoring the Senate,” “When the Senate is allowed to work the way it was designed to, it arrives at a result acceptable to people all along the political spectrum.” But if it is “an assembly line for one party’s partisan legislative agenda,” it creates “instability and strife” rather than “good stable law.”

I want to repeat that. These are the words of Leader MITCH MCCONNELL. I hope Leader MCCONNELL is listening and remembers these words. He hasn’t for the last 6 months, and it has only led to trouble for him and his Republican colleagues in the Senate. Let me read it again, the 2014 speech, “Restoring the Senate” by MITCH MCCONNELL. “When the Senate is allowed to work the way it was designed to, it arrives at a result acceptable to people all along the political spectrum. But if it’s “an assembly line for one party’s partisan legislative agenda,” it creates “instability and strife” rather than “good stable law.”

Leader MCCONNELL, I couldn’t agree more. It is time to start over on healthcare, abandon the idea of cutting Medicaid to give a tax break to the wealthy, abandon this new repeal and run, and use the regular order to arrive “at a result acceptable to people all along the political spectrum,” as Leader MCCONNELL once said. I dare say it would create a much better result for the American people as well.

Thank you.

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.