



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2, 2017

No. 131

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, August 4, 2017, at 1 p.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2, 2017

The Senate met at 10 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:

Let us pray.

Holy God, You make the clouds Your chariot and walk upon the wind. You illuminate the darkness with Your presence and provide for the salvation of our souls. Great is Your faithfulness.

Today, make our lawmakers heirs of peace, demonstrating that they are Your children, as they strive to stay within the circle of Your loving providence for their lives. May they take pleasure in doing Your will, knowing that by so doing, they are fulfilling Your purposes in our world.

Lord, You are never far from us, but often we are far from You. So show us Your ways and teach us Your paths. Thank You that Your mercy is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who come to You with reverence. May Your glory endure forever.

We pray in Your great 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. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

WORK BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as I said yesterday, the Senate has more work ahead this legislative period, including passing the FDA user fees legislation and confirming a number of nominees.

We have made important progress already, and just last night we passed the critical Veterans Choice legislation. That bill, which is now on its way to the President's desk, will allow many veterans to bypass long wait and travel times at VA facilities by accessing private care.

We also confirmed several nominees. We confirmed eight officials who will be critical to advancing administration policy in the Defense Department. It is a good start, but we have other nominees to confirm for many other positions, both security- and nonsecurity-related, across many different agencies and departments. In the national security realm, for instance, we must confirm nominees for the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, and the intelligence community.

The Senate also came together to confirm a well-qualified judicial nominee for the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, as well as the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Christopher A. Wray. The position of FBI Director is one of great importance

when it comes to protecting the American people, especially at a time when we face a range of threats both at home and abroad. Wray's impressive credentials, demeanor, and commitment to the rule of law make clear that he is the right person to lead the Bureau in its efforts to keep our communities safe. The work of an FBI Director is difficult, but I am confident that Wray is capable of shouldering this important responsibility and that he will lead the FBI with the strength and professionalism that the position demands.

Our work on nominees continues today. We will, for instance, take a procedural vote on the nomination for the National Labor Relations Board later this morning. But there is more to do. I was pleased to hear the Democratic leader reaffirm his interest in working with us now to clear more nominees before the conclusion of this work period. Many of these nominees have been held up far too long, leaving the administration without a number of key officials at various agencies.

I look forward to our Democratic colleagues working with us to finish up the FDA user fees legislation that I mentioned earlier, as well. Members will continue to work on other issues in the meantime, such as tax reform, which is one of the things the Senate—led by the Finance Committee—will turn its collective attention toward after the State work period.

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S4697

TAX REFORM

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, during the 8 years of the Obama administration, our economy failed to live up to its full potential—meager growth rates, wages that failed to keep pace, and a decline in opportunities. Middle-class families were hurting, and they needed policies that would allow the economy to begin to grow again. Unfortunately, the last administration often gave them exactly the opposite. Some were sins of commission, such as making things worse with an aggressive regulatory rampage. Others were sins of omission, such as failing to address an outdated tax code that has made American companies increasingly uncompetitive in a global economy and, as a result, has moved investment and jobs offshore.

Then, in November Americans chose to go in a different direction. They elected a pro-growth President who would sign legislation from a pro-growth Congress. Ever since, we have been working to turn the tide back in favor of the middle class. We have undertaken what has been described as the “most ambitious regulatory rollbacks since Reagan.” We have pursued policies that can once again encourage job growth and American investment.

Just last week, the administration and congressional leaders and, most importantly, the chairmen of the Senate Finance and the House Ways and Means Committees issued a joint statement outlining shared principles for unleashing the American economy through comprehensive tax reform. Comprehensive tax reform represents the single most important action we can take now to grow the economy and to help middle-class families finally get ahead. It is no secret that the current Tax Code is overly complex and highly punitive and makes it harder for individuals and small businesses to succeed.

Fortunately, we now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fundamentally rethink it. It has been over three decades since that last happened. In the years since, the international economy has grown much more competitive. American workers and American businesses have only found it harder to keep up with foreign contenders. Put simply, the rest of the world is running circles around us in this area, making it more difficult for American firms to hire, invest, and compete.

The time has come to fix this so we can help our economy grow and help the individuals and families we represent realize their true potential. For families, we want to make their taxes simpler, fairer, and lower. For small businesses, we want to provide the conditions they need to form, invest, and grow. For all American businesses and their employees, we want to ensure they have the best chance to compete with foreign companies and succeed. We want a tax system that encourages American companies to bring jobs home again.

These are some of the key goals of tax reform. They sound like goals we should all share, regardless of party. For years, the tax-writing committees have focused on this particular subject—holding hearings, soliciting input from stakeholders, and considering the views and priorities of Members, both on and off these committees. They are eager now to begin the process of developing tax reform legislation that achieves the shared goals I outlined above.

The administration and congressional leaders stated:

We have always been in agreement that tax relief for American families should be at the heart of our plan. . . . And we are now confident that . . . there is a viable approach for ensuring a level playing field between American and foreign companies and workers, while protecting American jobs and the U.S. tax base.

Our expectation is for this legislation to move through the committees this fall under regular order, followed by consideration on both the House and Senate floors. There is a great deal of bipartisan consensus about what ails our Tax Code, and my hope is that our friends on the other side of the aisle will join us in a serious way to address it, because the American people deserve a tax system that works for them instead of against them. They deserve a tax code that encourages companies to bring jobs home instead of encouraging just the opposite. Americans deserve true comprehensive tax reform.

I appreciate the good work of our colleagues in the administration and by Members in both Chambers already to get us there, particularly Finance Committee Chairman ORRIN HATCH. Chairman HATCH has been working hard with his fellow Finance Committee members—Senators from both sides of the aisle—literally for years, on this issue, and he continues to lead the way today. Under his leadership and the leadership of Chairman BRADY in the House, Congress's tax-writing committees will advance these principles through regular order, so that Members on both sides of the aisle will have an opportunity to participate in this historic effort, if that is what they choose to do.

This will not be an easy process, but the people we represent are depending on us for help. Now is the time to deliver tax reform, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to accomplish it.

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, first, on the topic of healthcare: I was very happy to hear the statement from Chairman ALEXANDER and Ranking Member MURRAY yesterday in which they pledged the HELP Committee to the task of restabilizing and strengthening the markets, particularly by guaranteeing the cost-sharing reduction program. As Chairman ALEXANDER said: “Without the payment of these cost-sharing reductions, Americans will be hurt.” That is clear. Everyone has said it, even the insurance industry, and yet President Trump continues to treat this critical program as if it is some kind of political hostage. The President treats the critical program as if it is some kind of hostage.

Insurers in three States—North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Iowa—have each released separate rates for 2018: one if the payments are made, and one that is 20 percent higher if they are not. In these three States, premiums will be 20 percent higher if President Trump refuses to carry out the law. Every American will see that increase in their monthly bill and know it is a Trump premium tax.

Insurers from coast to coast have said that uncertainty surrounding the cost-sharing reductions are the No. 1 threat to the stability of our markets. State insurance commissioners—many of them Republican—are announcing higher rates for next year and directly blaming the President's failure to guarantee these payments, as the insurance commissioner of Idaho did yesterday.

We have enough problems in the world right now without President Trump creating entirely new ones out of political spite and a petty vindictiveness. When you lose politically, you don't take it out on the American people. That is not Presidential; that is just small.

So we would say to the President: Stop holding this critical program as if it is some kind of political hostage, stop the sabotage, make the payments this month so Chairman ALEXANDER and Ranking Member MURRAY can get to work in a bipartisan way on a longer stabilization package.

Let me salute a large number of my Republican colleagues who agree we have to do cost sharing. They have realized that just sticking with President Trump—particularly when his motivations are not Presidential but are sort of nasty, vindictive—is a bad idea. I salute you because, for the good of America, we have to work together.

TAX REFORM

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, on taxes, another matter. Yesterday, my friend the majority leader brought down the curtain on bipartisan tax reform before a discussion between our two parties could even start, dismissing the prospect of Democratic