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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Thursday, October 19, 2017, at 12 p.m.

Senate

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 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.

Eternal God, the fountain of all wisdom and power, we are grateful that You still rule in Heaven. May our lawmakers continue to remember that Your purposes will prevail and that Your justice cannot be thwarted. Answer the prayers of our Senators as they daily seek Your wisdom, guidance, and protection. Lord, sustain them with Your unfailing love, rescuing them from the destructive forces that go contrary to Your will. Instruct our legislators even in the night seasons so that Your will may be done on Earth even as it is done in Heaven. Do for them exceedingly, abundantly above all that they can ask or imagine according to Your power working in and through them.

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. SASSE). The majority leader is recognized.

WORK BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the Senate, as I said yesterday, has a full schedule of work before it this fall. It is what the President, Vice President, and I discussed at our working lunch at the White House yesterday.

This week, the Senate is advancing one of the most important items on our agenda with consideration of the comprehensive budget for fiscal year 2018. It is a good budget that reflects the hard work of Chairman ENZI and the Budget Committee. It will help rein in Federal spending. It will help our country achieve balance. It will also help our economy grow.

One of the ways this budget will do so is by providing legislative tools to advance tax reform. After a lost decade of missed economic opportunities, America's middle class deserves an economy that reaches for its full potential again, and tax reform is the single most important thing we can do today to get there.

It is not hard to see why. Our current Tax Code is archaic, arduous, and often just plain bizarre. It holds our economy back. It can hold workers' wages down. It actually incentivizes companies to shift jobs and profits overseas. It makes it easier for the wealthy and well-connected to game the system. Yet it is almost impossible for anyone else to understand it.

A constituent from Harrodsburg, KY, wrote to my office exasperated about the unfair Tax Code. This is what she said: "I am writing today to express my complete and total disgust for the complex, completely unfair, and completely messed up tax system in this country." This constituent, who has worked for nearly three decades as a CPA and has helped countless Kentuckians navigate the system, described some of the hardships faced by her clients and then continued by saying that "the honest, hardworking folks can't get ahead, the cheaters don't get caught and the rich just keep getting richer."

That was my constituent from Harrodsburg, KY, summing up today's Tax Code. Her story underlines the systemic problems of our Tax Code, and it is often our Nation's workers—including those in Kentucky—who continue to bear the burden.

Recently, the Kentucky State treasurer wrote an op-ed calling on Congress to provide much needed relief from our Tax Code. "We need tax reform," she wrote, "to increase Kentucky's economic growth and for greater middle-class prosperity throughout the Commonwealth."

I agree. So does President Trump, his team, and our colleagues here in Congress. We are all in agreement that delivering relief to working families should be at the heart of our plan, and that is what we continue to work toward in developing tax reform.

For families and individuals in Kentucky and across the Nation, we think taxes should be lower, simpler, and fairer. Our plan calls for doubling the

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



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standard deduction and significantly increasing the child tax credit. We will eliminate loopholes that are primarily used by the wealthy while protecting incentives that benefit the middle class.

Our plan also reforms the Tax Code to provide relief to our Nation's small businesses and to make it easier to keep jobs here in America. In an increasingly competitive global economy, we are working to put American workers on a level playing field.

Above all, our goal is this. We want to take more money out of Washington's pockets and put more money into the pockets of the middle class in Kentucky and across our country.

This sounds like a place where we should all be able to agree—Republicans and Democrats alike. In fact, our friends on the other side of the aisle have often supported the idea of tax reform and bringing jobs back to America. I hope they will again in the course of this important effort. I hope they will not fall into blind partisanship and reject any collaboration simply because they don't like the President.

Instead, they can work with us in a serious way on an overhaul of the Tax Code that can truly help the people of Kentucky, help the people of their States, and help Americans all across the land.

I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues in Congress and the administration to pass a responsible budget and to deliver tax reform for the American workers and families, who deserve an economy that reaches its true potential once again.

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. First, Mr. President, a brief word on healthcare. Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY continue to negotiate a bipartisan package of legislation to stabilize our healthcare markets and lower premiums, a process that began over the summer. From what I have heard, they are down to a few final issues and are hopefully close to an agreement that can be taken back to both of our caucuses. Congress ought to show, through the work started by Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY way back in July, that Congress can work in a bipartisan way on healthcare, and we have no intention of

going along with President Trump's reckless sabotage of the Nation's healthcare law.

Last week, President Trump showed that he is willing to take a wrecking ball to our Nation's healthcare for the sake of politics without any regard to the people it would hurt: veterans, senior citizens, kids, and folks struggling to afford insurance. President Trump was so angry they couldn't repeal and replace, he instead said: I am going to wreck the system. The problem is, it hurts millions of innocent people all for pique and politics. He has shown he is willing to put at risk the healthcare of millions of Americans. President Trump's decision to end the cost-sharing program was an act of impulsive malice with no benefit and no end.

This seems to be his MO. He throws red meat to his rightwing base, whether it is on healthcare, immigration, Iran, or disaster aid. Then he says to Congress: You fix it up. That is not the way to lead. That is following. That is an act that exhibits no strength—no strength.

We want our President to be a strong leader. Every American does, regardless of ideology, but when the President plays so many political games that are not just harmless but that hurt people and then says to Congress to clean it up, blaming Congress for the mess he created, it doesn't work, it is not fair, it is not right, and it is the reason that, except for his base, President Trump's numbers keep sliding. They are flat now, and they are down below 40 percent. No President has had such low numbers. By the way, it is not helping the Republican Party. Numbers today show a record difference between whether people prefer Democrats or Republicans, so I would urge him to stop these harmful, almost malicious shenanigans and let us all work together for the good of our country.

On healthcare, we in Congress should continue to shore up the healthcare markets and lower premiums in a bipartisan way. We ought to reject the path of President Trump's sabotage and destruction and instead view a path of consensus and compromise. That is the way it has to go. No side wins everything they want. That is not how the Founding Fathers set up this country, otherwise we would be a dictatorship or a country without checks and balances. We ought to work together to improve our healthcare system, to lower costs for people, and to ensure that more people have access to health coverage. We Democrats have been pushing that for several months now.

I salute Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY for understanding that. They have been in careful negotiations that represent the best first step forward on healthcare. I hope we hear more from them on the status of negotiations. I hope they can come to an agreement that includes curtailing the sabotage I spoke of that the President is doing. I hope Leader McCONNELL and I can sup-

port this bill together, and then maybe even the House might pass it. The President has said, I think—we don't know, it changes from day to day—but I think the most recent pronouncement is that he might sign it.

TAX REFORM AND THE BUDGET

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on the GOP tax plan, as soon as today, we will vote on the motion to proceed to the GOP budget resolution, which includes instructions to increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion, slash Medicare and Medicaid by \$1.5 trillion, and sets up, unfortunately for everybody, the same destructive, partisan process on taxes that the GOP used for healthcare called reconciliation. It says: We don't need you. We are just going to rush it through with our votes. It didn't work on healthcare. It is not going to work on this either.

Tax reform—if it is real reform—or even just tax cuts are very complicated. If you don't have the center coming together, everyone can pick it apart, and they are setting themselves up to do just that.

Although the Republican tax plan is little more than principles at the moment—and we have talked a lot about these principles of the Republican plan—it is so far away from what the American people want because of the process they have decided to use. When you don't want Democrats and use just Republicans, the people of the hard right—a minority in the Republican Party probably—can push the debate so far over because they say: We are not voting for this unless you do it our way. So we have a bill that really is so out of touch and harmful to all but the wealthiest Americans that it is hard to believe the Republicans are putting it forward with a straight face.

It is going to be the first time, my friends, that Republicans in Congress will vote to increase our Nation's deficit by \$1.5 trillion, which is spelled out as clear as day in the budget. I hope, given this dramatic increase in the deficit, all of the Republican deficit hawks are out of their nests for this one.

For the sake of ideological consistency, the same folks who decried debt and deficit under President Obama ought to denounce them under President Trump, but we haven't heard much of a peep from a whole lot of Republicans on this side with a few notable, brave, and leaderlike exceptions.

Here is what Representative WALKER, a conservative Member of the House, said, lamenting what was going on:

[The deficit is] a great talking point when you have an administration that is Democrat-led. It's a little different now that Republicans have both houses and the administration. There's been less talk about it this year with a Republican-led administration than there has been the last seven or eight years.

Representative WALKER is exactly accurate.