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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.

Eternal Father, strong to save, we love You because You are our shield and deliverer. You have been our God from the moment of our birth, loving and sustaining us with Your mercies.

Lord, You loved us before we loved You, and You empowered us to live productive lives. Cast out of our Senators any fear and anxiety, as their love for You increases. Teach them to treat others as they would want to be treated themselves, fulfilling Your admonition to practice the Golden Rule. May they seek You early, realizing that not an hour goes by when we do not need You. Supply all their needs from the bounty of Your riches in glory.

We pray in Your sovereign 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

TRAIN DERAILMENT IN WASHINGTON STATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, to begin with, all of our thoughts this afternoon are with the victims of this morning's tragic train derailment in Washington State and with their families as well. Our gratitude is with the first responders who answered the call and rushed to the scene.

TAX CUTS AND JOBS BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on a different matter entirely, the Senate has a number of important tasks to complete this week for the American people. On Friday we took another significant step toward delivering major tax relief for middle-class families and small businesses when the House and Senate conference committee released the final text of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. We are closer than ever to seizing this once-in-a-generation opportunity to update our Tax Code, to make America stronger, and to help middle-class families keep more of their hard-earned money.

The last decade has not been easy for middle-class Americans. Families, like many I represent in Kentucky, were hit hard by the great recession. Many continue to feel its effects. But too often, instead of helping people get back on their feet, Washington has been an obstacle. Our broken and outdated Tax Code lets the government take too much money out of Americans' paychecks. The Obama administration's runaway regulations slowed job growth and destroyed opportunities just when people needed them most.

Help is on the way. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is a major step toward a stronger, more prosperous America with higher wages, higher take-home pay, more jobs, and better opportunities for middle-class Americans. First and foremost, the bill provides immediate relief by letting Americans keep more of their paychecks. A typical

family of four earning the median family income will get a tax cut of more than \$2,000. We are taking that money out of Washington's pocket and putting it right back into theirs. By modernizing the way we tax businesses, we will make America a better place to invest, start small businesses, and create middle-class jobs.

Our tax bill will make it less attractive for American businesses to send jobs and investments overseas and more attractive to expand and invest here at home. That is why American manufacturers say they are excited about this bill and plan to hire new workers, while Chinese officials say it has them worried.

The conference report will also repeal the punitive individual mandate tax at the heart of ObamaCare. Under ObamaCare, Americans must either buy the kind of health insurance that Washington thinks they should buy or pay a heavy tax penalty. By repealing this unfair penalty, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will give low- and middle-class families even more tax relief, along with the flexibility to make their own healthcare decisions. The bill will also strengthen America's future by enhancing our energy independence.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act provides for further responsible development of Alaska's oil and gas potential. Unleashing more of our own natural resources will create good jobs and improve America's energy security. The historic accomplishments in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will bring immediate relief to struggling families and set America on a trajectory toward greater strength and prosperity.

I commend the conferees—especially Chairman HATCH, Chairman MURKOWSKI, and Chairman ENZI—for their work to help finalize the conference report. I look forward to voting for its passage, and I urge all of our colleagues to join me in voting to give the American families the relief they need and richly deserve.

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



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FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, before the end of this week, Congress must agree on a continuing resolution to sustain the critical operations of the Federal Government. In this process, it is vital that we ensure that our men and women in uniform have the resources they need to protect Americans and face the challenges of a dangerous world.

During the Obama administration, the readiness of our all-volunteer Armed Forces was hurt by irresponsible cuts to the Department of Defense, which have damaged combat readiness. The military suffered a disproportionate burden under the Budget Control Act. The arbitrary demand that increases in defense spending must be equally matched by increases in nondefense spending should not stand in the way of delivering the resources needed to restore near-term and long-term readiness. Earlier this year, we rightly set aside that misguided standard and took steps to fully meet the needs of our warfighters. This week, we need to do so one more time.

If Congress fails to reach agreement on government funding, our military will suffer intolerable budget cuts that would jeopardize the tools and the training our servicemembers need to fulfill their missions. Our responsibilities run deeper than keeping the government open and ensuring our warfighters have the resources they need.

Before the year ends, we must also deliver results in several additional areas of vital importance to the American people. We must renew funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program so the parents of 9 million children who are covered by CHIP can know that their children's healthcare is secure. We must reauthorize a critical foreign intelligence program that the men and women of American law enforcement need to keep our Nation safe from those who wish to harm us. We must renew the popular Veterans Choice Program, which aims to cut wait times for VA healthcare and to give our veterans flexibility to access care outside of the system. We must approve supplemental disaster funding for States and Territories that are still struggling to rebuild after a year of devastating disasters. We must pass a routine waiver to avoid unacceptable cuts of Medicare funding and other vital programs.

Since the enactment of the pay-go law in 2010, Congress has never allowed a sequester to take effect, especially for tax bills, and we must act again this week to ensure that vulnerable Americans are not harmed.

Of particular importance, faced with the continued failure of ObamaCare to keep health insurance affordable for working Americans, we must take this opportunity to pass bipartisan solutions that will help stabilize collapsing health insurance markets and lower premiums for individuals and families across the country.

Across all these critical areas, Congress must do what is right for the American people and take action this week. I urge each Member of this body to come together and help pass a funding agreement that fulfills our responsibilities to the Nation. I look forward to working with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure that happens.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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.

TRAIN CRASH IN WASHINGTON STATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, our hearts go out to everyone who has been affected by that horrible train crash near Seattle, WA. I know that authorities are still investigating what caused the crash. We have to find out what went wrong and then work to fix it. We in New York know what this is like. We have had a few of these derailments and crashes—Spuyten Duyvil on the Metro-North, where four people died about a year and a half ago or a year or two ago. It was very bad. We have to work on train safety, and there are lots of things to do. I am not going to talk about that now, but we do have to. For now, we are wishing the very best for everyone on that train, and we remain deeply grateful to the first responders who reported to the scene.

REMEMBERING BOB WILMERS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on another sad note and before I move to the substance of the day, I want to spend a moment in recognizing a dear friend of mine who passed away this weekend, Bob Wilmers, one of the most respected and prominent benefactors in Buffalo, NY—one of the great cities in my State and in our country.

Very few men had done as much for Buffalo since its founding hundreds of years ago as Bob Wilmers had done for the last several decades. He was the chairman of M&T Bank. He helped the bank grow from a small bank into one of the largest employers in the region—6,500 employees. As he built the business and created thousands of good-paying, middle-class jobs, he helped Upstate New York dramatically.

M&T Bank was a large bank, but it was not one of these banks that engaged in swaps overseas or other risky

types of investments. It lent money to small businesses, and it had a deep caring for the communities which it served. It was a model bank, in my opinion. It did an amazing job in helping to revitalize our upstate economy, which has had trouble over the last several decades due to so many different things, including bad trade policies.

Bob was also not just committed to the bank, which he loved, as he loved the employees, cared about them, and was such an honorable employee; he was also committed to Buffalo and philanthropy. He directed almost \$5 million to local nonprofit organizations in New York—the bank did under his leadership. That is because Bob himself was a philanthropist. He was a man with a big heart, and he always gave in every way. He spent many years supporting one of the great art museums in America, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, just to name a couple. He was a booster to everything Buffalo. He was never in the camp that thought Buffalo's best days were behind her. He always believed in Buffalo's potential and its future and helped to make that happen. The city of Buffalo is turning around. We are so proud in so many different ways. It is, in good part, because of Bob Wilmers.

On a personal level, my wife and I will miss him. He visited my wife for lunch a few months ago. He was 83 years old, and he was on his rickety, old bike and rode through the streets of New York City to meet her so that they could have lunch.

Bob's wife Elisabeth and Iris and I spent many happy hours together. He was a brilliant man, a brilliant banker, decent, caring, and civic-minded. The loss is the Wilmers family's, and our condolences go to Elisabeth. It is a loss for Buffalo and the United States. Bob will be truly missed. His untimely death has sent shock waves throughout New York State, and we will miss him so.

SPECIAL COUNSEL MUELLER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on a different subject, I again warn about the danger of the smear campaign against Special Counsel Mueller.

Over the weekend, allies of the President in the media escalated their phony attacks on Special Counselor Mueller to an outrageous degree. One of the assertions that arose this weekend was that Special Counsel Mueller improperly obtained emails from the Trump transition team. This is a bald-faced lie. There is no proof behind the allegations. There is no substance behind the allegations. They can't point to any indication that Mueller's team did anything that was improper, let alone illegal. The Mueller team is allowed to request whatever it wants. They are special counsel, special prosecutors. They either have to get the accountholder's permission or go