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Senate

The Senate met at 10:01 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable LUTHER STRANGE, a Senator from the State of Alabama.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Answer us, Eternal One, as we lift our hearts to You. Have mercy upon our lawmakers and hear their prayers. Remind them that You have set apart the godly for Yourself, surrounding them with the shield of Your favor. May they never forget that You alone can keep a nation safe.

Lord, lead them on the path that will bring them to abundant life, telling them what to do and showing them which way to turn. As Hanukkah ended last evening and Christmas approaches, may Your blessings and peace rest on our Nation and world.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 21, 2017.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable LUTHER STRANGE, a

Senator from the State of Alabama, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. STRANGE thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

TAX REFORM BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, throughout this process of tax reform, Senate Republicans explained time and again that we are fighting for the middle class. Our opponents lobbed one attack after another, claiming we were selling hard-working families short. Of course, that is completely wrong. The tax bill we passed was written to help middle-class families from the very beginning. Our goal was to make their taxes lower, simpler, and fairer.

Under our legislation, the typical family of four making the median family income can expect nearly \$2,000 in tax relief next year. Just yesterday, we saw that tax reform has already inspired job creators to increase take-home pay for thousands of their employees. Yet not a single Democrat joined us to pass this tax relief for American families.

What is worse, just before we voted, Senate Democrats raised a point of order that proved who is really going after low-income families. When given the chance, Senate Democrats, led by the junior Senator from Vermont, raised a procedural challenge to strike out a provision that protects colleges that provide students with tuition-free education. Let me say it again. The junior Senator from Vermont raised a procedural challenge to strike out a provision that protects colleges that

provide students with tuition-free education. They chose to do it after the same provision had already passed the Senate before we went to conference. They didn't have to raise this challenge. It is not required. They chose to. In the process, they knowingly hurt schools that provide tuition-free education to students who can't otherwise afford to go to college.

Let me give you an example. Berea College, in my home State of Kentucky, is dedicated to educating students from the Appalachian region who have limited economic resources—in other words, poor kids from Appalachia. Their students' average household income is less than \$30,000 a year. These are kids from families making less than \$30,000 a year. They are from Appalachia, and their families don't have the means to pay for their education.

Here is what they do at Berea. Every single student receives a scholarship, which covers the cost of their tuition—every student. The students work at the school and in their communities to help cover additional living expenses beyond the costs of attending school. In fact, the vast majority of Berea students are able to graduate debt-free because of the model. For example, they have a great restaurant there. You go there and eat lunch. The kids are cooking, and they are serving. They are working their way through school. When they graduate, they don't have any debt.

Berea College, located in one of the most economically challenged areas of my State, offers a quality education to students with the greatest financial need, and it has done so since 1855—1855. It was founded by abolitionists.

In fact, as my friend in the Chair knows, I am originally from his State. Let me tell you about when I first heard of Berea College. My grandmother and my grandfather had an African-American family who helped them around the house, and they had

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



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an adopted daughter. I was a little kid, and I remember them talking about her going to college.

I said: Where are you going?

She said: I am going to Berea.

I said: Where is that?

She said: It is up in Kentucky.

It was the closest college that would take African-American students at that time. Since they didn't have the means to pay for the tuition, it was a great opportunity to get a tuition-free education.

A few years ago, I called the president of Berea College and said: I would like to try to locate somebody.

He said: Well, the privacy rules are such that all I can do is to see if we can find them and see if they want to meet you.

I said: That is fair enough. This would be a person about a certain age, who would have originally been from Athens, AL. If you can identify this student, I would love to meet her.

He did. When she came to my office in the Capitol with her daughter, who lives in the area, I found out that she graduated from Berea and went on to be a nurse. She lived in the north most of her life and is now relocated in Athens, AL.

This is Berea College. This is the college these guys over here—every single one of them—voted to target by making their endowment subject to a tax that would otherwise only apply to the really big schools in the country—the Ivy League schools.

Every year, Berea uses the returns on its endowment solely for scholarships, and that sets it apart from nearly every other college and university in the Nation. I worked with the Finance Committee to include a provision to protect schools like Berea from taxes on endowments that apply to private schools who choose to sit on these large funds rather than using them aggressively to reduce the cost of attending school. But Senate Democrats identified this exemption as a bridge too far. Instead of allowing the provision to stand, thereby protecting these students at schools like Berea, they decided to pick partisan politics and attack the measure simply because they could. In the process, they assured that Berea would bear the brunt of their blatant political calculation.

Because Democrats stripped this part of the bill, Berea estimates it could pay a tax penalty of nearly \$1 million every year. Berea's president has already explained to us the effect of this tax: The school will be forced to offer fewer scholarships to kids.

The junior Senator from Vermont and his allies, which included every single Member of the Democratic conference, have chosen to make it harder for low-income students to earn a college degree. This is especially hypocritical coming from the man who claims to support free college for all. During the Presidential campaign last year, I remember he was promising free college to everyone. Apparently, that

is free college to everyone except at Berea College, where it is already free, thanks to generations of donors who built their endowment.

I am at a loss for words. I don't understand how they can claim to fight for students one moment and then make it harder for students to afford college the next. They chose to attack the tax bill by any means necessary, even though they knew the outcome and, in the process, launched a direct attack on the ability of schools like Berea to provide tuition-free education to needy students.

This action by Senate Democrats is deeply disappointing and will provide real and lasting harm. I hope my friends on the other side of the aisle realize the American people will see their partisan tactics for what they really are—an attack on low-income students who want to pursue opportunity and find success.

A number of my colleagues in Congress have said they are interested in fixing this problem, including my colleague from Kentucky, Congressman ANDY BARR. I am committed to working with him and other Members of Congress, and with schools like Berea, to help right this wrong. It is hard not to repeat. This amendment was offered by the man who wanted to provide every student in America with free college tuition but at the same time wanted to reduce the number of scholarships at a college where it is already free, actually, thanks to the generosity of decades of wealthy people who gave to their endowment, believing the mission of providing a college education for poor kids from Appalachia was a worthy goal. We are going to fix this problem. We are going to fix it as soon as we can.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, the Senate has important business to conclude this week. The American people are counting on Congress to reach a government funding agreement. If we were to fail to reach an agreement, we would be failing to ensure that our all-volunteer Armed Forces have all of the resources they need to protect our country in the face of myriad threats from all around the globe. We would be subjecting programs that American families rely on to draconian sequestration cuts that none of us want to take effect.

The Senate stands ready to take up an agreement as soon as one originates over in the House. We are ready to work together, across the aisle, to ensure there is no lapse in funding for critical services. Furthermore, my Republican colleagues in the Senate stand ready and eager to ensure full and long-term funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program. There are 9 million children who receive coverage through CHIP. They and their parents deserve to know that Congress is committed to them.

Republicans agree. We support a provision that would fund CHIP not just for a few weeks but for 5 years. Unfortunately, our Democratic colleagues are unwilling to make that commitment to American families. Thus far, they have opposed all of our efforts to include 5 years of CHIP funding in this week's agreement. Whatever partisan politics are leading my colleagues on the other side to this mystifying conclusion, it is time to put them aside and do right by our constituents. I hope we can all work together and give Americans the peace of mind they deserve, particularly going into the Christmas season.

TRIBUTE TO LUTHER STRANGE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on a completely different matter, I would like to say a few words in tribute to a fine colleague whose all-too-brief time in the Senate will soon draw to a close.

Senator LUTHER STRANGE of Alabama is the newest Member of this body, having been sworn in just this past February, but he did not waste any time in making an impact. In this historic year for the Senate, LUTHER quickly emerged as a strong voice on policy and an important vote on landmark legislation.

On a personal level, it didn't take anyone long to realize that this newcomer would rank among the most diligent, dedicated, and public-spirited Members of this institution. At first, we even wondered whether LUTHER might be a little too diligent.

Upon his arriving in Washington, the Senator dived into the task of meeting his colleagues with the friendly earnestness that is his calling card. The first time LUTHER passed Senator ROBERTS in a Capitol hallway, he stopped to introduce himself and share his excitement to be joining the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee. There was nothing unusual there, but I have it on good authority that the very next day, when LUTHER found himself sharing an elevator with Senator ROBERTS, the junior Senator from Alabama introduced himself all over again. Not long after, a chance meeting on the train occasioned yet a third introduction. PAT ROBERTS had to put a stop to it.

"Yes, Luther," he broke in. "I think we've met before—and we're sure glad to have you here, too." We certainly were glad as well.

LUTHER came to the Senate with a national reputation for integrity and excellence in public service. That started young. The proud son of a Navy veteran turned college professor, this Birmingham paperboy made Eagle Scout at age 13—an accomplishment that still shows up on his lapel from time to time.

He received his bachelor's from Tulane, where—and I know this may come as a shock—the man the Senate historian has apparently verified as the tallest Senator in history played scholarship basketball.