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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 13, 2018, at 12 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, MARCH 12, 2018

The Senate met at 4 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JONI ERNST, a Senator from the State of Iowa.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our source of hope, we praise You for Your daily mercies. Bless our lawmakers with Your goodness, empowering them to labor for justice and truth.

Lord, guide them as they grapple with difficult issues so that they will choose right over political expediency. Give them wisdom to forget yesterday's disappointments and tomorrow's fears. Teach them to focus on accomplishing their present duties for Your Name's glory, trusting You to take care of all their tomorrows. May they build their hopes in You.

We pray in Your merciful 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, March 12, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JONI ERNST, a Senator from the State of Iowa, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. ERNST thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

CONGRATULATING KENTUCKY NCAA BASKETBALL TEAMS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I want to start with what I know is on everybody's mind, and that is Kentucky basketball.

The University of Kentucky Wildcats men's team won their 31st SEC title—their fourth straight, by the way. Hall of Fame coach John Calipari is leading Big Blue Nation back to the NCAA tournament and, we hope, to the school's ninth national championship.

At Western Kentucky University, the Lady Toppers just brought home a second straight Conference USA title. They are hoping the hardware keeps on

coming as they head to their school's 20th showing in the NCAA tournament.

I proudly join many Kentuckians in congratulating both UK and WKU. We will be rooting for them in the Big Dance.

ECONOMIC GROWTH, REGULATORY RELIEF, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, later this afternoon the Senate will vote to advance the financial reform bill that is before us.

Senator CRAPO's legislation starts from a simple premise: Small community lenders on Main Street are not the same as the multi-trillion-dollar banks on Wall Street. But since the Dodd-Frank Act passed in 2010, too many regulations have treated all of them the same and imposed a crushing burden on community banks that are not able to bear it.

A small number of our colleagues in the Senate seem dead set against any commonsense reforms to help these smaller institutions. They are dusting off old arguments and predicting apocalyptic consequences from even this modest set of reforms. That is a shame because when small lenders shut their doors, communities throughout America pay the price. Even in this online era, research tells us that the closure of physical banks makes it harder for farmers, ranchers, small business owners, and low-income families to access capital. This story has played out thousands of times across the country.

The legislation before us would restore a community lenders' ability to

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



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provide credit without having to navigate a maze of regulation that was designed for far bigger organizations.

This commonsense bill has earned the support of a wide bipartisan coalition. I would urge all Members to join us in moving it forward this afternoon.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now on one final matter, for more than 20 years, Hope House in Spokane, WA, has offered vulnerable women refuge from the streets and a safe place to sleep. Unfortunately, the need is great. Even after stacking bunk beds in every available inch, the shelter reaches capacity every single night. Last year, more than 2,000 women had to be turned away.

But there is good news this morning. Premera Blue Cross, a major health insurer in the Pacific Northwest, announced that it will make a \$1 million contribution to the organization that operates Hope House. The gift will jump-start the nonprofit's plan to build a brand-new shelter with 120 beds—triple the current capacity.

Across the State, in Everett, WA, another organization called Cocoon House serves at-risk and homeless youth. They are also receiving a donation of \$1.6 million to finish funding a brand-new youth center.

What has made all of this possible? Well, that would be tax reform. Premera's president and CEO explained that America's new 21st century Tax Code is allowing his company to devote major new resources to help investment and philanthropy.

The women of Hope House and the children of Cocoon House are not alone. There are stories like this all over our country. Just how many Americans' lives will be changed for the better by tax reform when all is said and done?

There are the big donations to countless nonprofits such as these serving homeless women and children, higher take-home pay for American families to help them make ends meet, more investment and more job opportunities over the long term now that our Tax Code gives our job creators a fairer fight with overseas competitors, and, of course, special bonuses, raises, and new benefits for 4 million American workers and counting.

We can add Premera workers to that list, by the way. They are getting \$15,000 bonuses as well. Every single Democrat voted to block these good things—every single one of these guys over here. They did all they could to stop tax reform from happening. Now that the law they opposed is unleashing so much good news, they are in a tricky spot.

My colleagues across the aisle are falling back on the same old rhetoric. They are trying to divide Americans, pitting different groups against one another. Now they are even proposing to claw back tax reform. Well, with a Republican Congress, that is not going to

happen. Democrats may want to repeal tax reform; that is, repeal the bonuses, the raises, the family tax cuts, and the huge donations to life-changing organizations. They may want to repeal all of that, but Republicans set out to take money out of Washington's pocket and put it back in the pockets of the American people, who know best how to use it. We will make sure that is exactly where it stays.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

GUN SAFETY

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Madam President, after the deadly shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School, the American people are wondering if Congress can do something meaningful to curb the epidemic of gun violence—an epidemic that has gone on far too long and taken the lives of far too many.

For years, Democrats have proposed commonsense gun safety policies to ensure that dangerous people can't get their hands on dangerous weapons. Recently, Democrats have reiterated our support for several specific measures, including universal background checks, protection orders, and a debate on banning assault weapons.

Americans of all political stripes support a debate on these policies, and yet the majority leader, who has given gun safety no time on the floor of the Senate, has also given us no indication we might consider the issue anytime soon. He is sweeping it under the rug. The NRA is powerful around here.

At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, President Trump failed to show the conviction and steady leadership required to make progress on this issue. After indicating support for a host of reasonable gun safety measures a few weeks ago and in front of the TV cameras he invited in, yesterday President Trump released a list of administration policies which represent a 180-degree reversal. What President Trump said at the public meeting and what he proposed yesterday are opposites.

After signaling, for instance, he would be for raising the age of purchase of assault weapons from 18 to 21—a modest measure—President Trump backed off saying he would leave it to the States and the courts to decide. That is a copout, and we know that. After indicating support for uni-

versal background checks, President Trump makes no mention of closing the dangerous gun show loophole or internet sales loophole. There is no mention of anti-domestic violence legislation, no mention of assault weapons or support for significant changes to protection orders. The President's plan consists only of small-bore, NRA-approved policies, including the absurd proposal to send more guns into classrooms by arming teachers.

In the wake of so many American tragedies, the Trump proposal on gun safety is utterly insufficient as a response. Even if you discarded the idea of arming teachers and took the Fix NICS proposal and the changes to mental health in President Trump's proposal, that wouldn't be close to enough to address the issue of gun violence. The Nation is clamoring for significant, meaningful progress on gun safety, but President Trump's proposal is just a baby step, when America needs to take a giant leap.

The administration's proposal makes it perfectly clear that President Trump has an obeisance to the NRA. Even when President Trump momentarily departs the NRA script, he quickly gets reeled back in. If President Trump, his staff, and some of our Republican friends are wondering why his ratings are so low, it is because he does this all the time. At the meeting, he publicly challenged conservative Republican Senator TOOMEY. He said: Oh, I guess you are afraid of the NRA.

Well, Toomey is not afraid of the NRA. He has taken them on. It is President Trump who is afraid of the NRA. He is afraid to do anything that doesn't meet their approval. We all know what this Fix NICS bill is about. It is tiny, but it is OK with the NRA, so my good friend from Texas is happy to come to the floor and talk about it. When is he going to come to the floor and say something we really need that the NRA doesn't support? We are all waiting, not just for him but for our Republican colleagues. We all know the game going on here—make it seem like you want to do something but don't offend the NRA, which is way to the extreme when you look at where Americans are at on this issue.

After watching the same sequence of events take place on guns, on immigration, no one should be surprised when President Trump initially talks about bipartisanship but ends up caving to hard-right special interests. No one should be surprised that the Republican leadership in the Senate, when it comes to guns, does the same exact thing. In this case, the gun lobby is the hard-right special interest.

President Trump's behavior on the most sensitive political issues is turning into a predictable Kabuki theater, where he invites the cameras in, talks the good talk but then refuses to walk the walk. It shows great weakness in this President, and if he doesn't have the guts to move forward, he shouldn't invite the cameras in and act like he