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Senate

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.

O God and Father of humanity, guide our lawmakers with Your Spirit of truth and love. During days of difficulty, help them to remember that You will never leave or forsake them. Lord, provide them with the wisdom, courage, and patience to do what is best for our Nation and world. Give us all grace to maintain our faith and freedom with righteousness, fostering peace and good will for the glory of Your Name. Hasten, Lord, that perfect day, when pain and death shall cease and Your just rule shall fill the Earth with health, light, and peace.

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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Claria Horn Boom, of Kentucky, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern and Western Districts of Kentucky.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this week, as I stated yesterday, the Senate will focus on personnel business.

Six well-qualified nominees are currently before the Senate. They are awaiting the full consideration they clearly deserve. Their nominations have been vetted. Their expertise is well known. Their positions sit empty, waiting to be filled. The American people are waiting for their President to have his full team and for their Federal Government to be appropriately staffed.

If last evening's vote to advance Claria Horn Boom's district court nomination were any indication, we would be in for a productive week. Ninety-six of our colleagues voted in support—96. With such broad bipartisan support, you might think that filing cloture should not have been necessary in the first place.

With nominees as uncontroversial as these, you might think the Senate would roll quickly through them and move on to other business, but unfortunately, for more than a year now, our Democratic friends have used the partisan playbook to delay and obstruct even the least controversial nominees. So unless we can reach the kind of bipartisan agreement that was once the norm around here and process non-controversial nominees more promptly, we are left with no choice but to proceed the hard way, and that is just what we have done.

Facing historic obstruction, Republicans have confirmed ambitious reformists to crucial posts where fresh

ideas were long overdue, and we have confirmed top-notch legal minds to the Federal bench, including a record number of circuit court judges for a President's first year and the generational choice of Justice Neil Gorsuch, who was confirmed to the Supreme Court 1 year ago today.

I have already stated that the Senate will remain in session as long as it takes to clear this slate of nominees. Following the confirmation of Ms. Boom, we will move to consideration of John Ring to serve on the National Labor Relations Board. After Mr. Ring comes nominees to the Department of Labor, the EPA, and two more nominees to fill district court vacancies—all vetted, all qualified, all sitting right here in the Senate. In at least one case, several of my Democratic friends have already proactively announced support for the nominee. So let's get back on track together. Let's consider and confirm these nominees without delay.

TAX REFORM

Mr. President, on a further matter, something exciting has started to happen all across our country. In America's small towns and suburbs, Main Street businesses are dusting off "Help Wanted" signs. In our small cities, American manufacturers are expanding facilities and creating new products. In rural America, family farmers are investing in new equipment and looking forward to increased prosperity.

For years, all of these parts of our great Nation were more or less forgotten. Millions and millions of Americans were left behind. Whether by accident or by design, the Obama administration's economic policies brought some prosperity to America's biggest and richest urban areas, but our small towns, our suburbs, our smaller cities, and our rural areas and farming communities year after year saw next to no progress. This is the disparity that President Trump and this Republican Congress were elected to change.

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



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Our Democratic friends say they are proud of a record in which urban centers like New York and San Francisco thrived, but most other areas slipped behind. I wouldn't be proud of that record. Republicans wouldn't settle for that kind of outcome. That is why, as soon as this President and this Congress took office, we began implementing an inclusive, pro-growth agenda to reignite prosperity in every corner of our Nation. We cut taxes for middle-class families and small businesses. We repealed one burdensome job-killing regulation after another. We are grabbing every tool we can find to make life easier for middle-class families who were neglected by the previous administration's policies.

One prime example is our colleague Senator SCOTT's provision in last year's historic tax reform. His legislation lets economically depressed communities across the country be designated as "opportunity zones," earning special tax treatment to make investment and job creation more attractive. In effect, this piece of tax reform will help struggling American communities set up big neon signs saying "We are open for business."

Just yesterday, in my State of Kentucky, Governor Bevin announced the certification of 144 opportunity zones. My friends and colleagues on the State and local level are excited and optimistic again. This creative policy, along with the rest of tax reform, has the Kentuckians I serve looking forward to a brighter future. More States are following suit.

From the West End in Louisville and distressed areas in Eastern Kentucky to Stockton, CA, and everywhere in between, this Congress will have helped deliver new opportunities and new hope to many of the most vulnerable communities all across our country. All this progress—all because Republicans overcame lockstep partisan opposition and passed this historic tax reform law.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING DANIEL AKAKA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last Friday, America lost a good and gracious person, a statesman, and many of us in the Senate lost a personal friend.

Senator Daniel Akaka was as kind and decent a man as you would ever meet in life. For 3½ decades, Danny Akaka served the people of Hawaii in the U.S. Congress with dignity, humility, and deep caring.

The Hawaiian concept of "aloha" isn't a quality that many think of when they think of politicians. "Aloha" means mutual regard and affection. It means extending warmth and caring with no obligation in return, no strings attached. Danny Inouye, that giant of Hawaii and its history, once called Danny Akaka "a true ambassador of aloha."

When Danny Akaka announced in 2011 that he would not run for reelection to the Senate, then-Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie said:

The words aloha and Akaka are interchangeable. Daniel Akaka is Hawaii.

Now, at age 93, Senator Akaka is gone. I first met him in 1983. I was a newly elected Member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Then we sat together on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, the two of us next to one another down at the far end of the table. Danny had 6 years' seniority on me. We served together, worked together, laughed together, traveled together, and came to be friends.

Here was a man, a great politician, who didn't have a personal ego. Politics was always about someone else, about helping other people. In fact, he went out of his way to avoid the spotlight. But don't think for a minute that he was weak. I have memories seared in my mind—certainly October 11, 2002, when 22 Members of the Democratic caucus in the Senate voted against the resolution authorizing President Bush to invade Iraq—the Iraq war resolution Danny Akaka opposed. I can recall that it was nearly 1 in the morning when that rollcall ended and he left the floor after that historic vote. Soft-spoken, yes. Capable of making hard, meaningful, courageous decisions, certainly. That was a lonely road. I believe history has judged it to be the right vote.

Danny Akaka's vote, like so many, was deeply influenced by his own experience in the U.S. military. At 17 years of age, he witnessed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Two years later, after serving as a welder and diesel mechanic with the Army Corps of Engineers, he entered Active Duty with the Army and served in several areas across the Pacific.

After the war, he used his GI benefits to go to college, and only later did he realize he was still carrying a wound from that war—post-traumatic stress disorder. He said that earning a bachelor's and master's degree in education and working as a public school teacher and principal—his first profession—helped him to cope with PTSD.

In politics, his second career, he used his influence to help other members of the military, veterans and their families.

In 2008, as chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, Senator Danny Akaka cosponsored the post-9/11 GI bill of rights. That new GI bill of rights included a provision that I asked Danny to include to improve care for veterans wounded by another of the often-invisible wounds of war—traumatic brain injury. Senator Akaka's leadership helped to pass that important new law.

Two years later, then chairman of the Veterans' Committee, I appealed to Danny Akaka again for another provision. It was an idea actually authored originally by Senator Hillary Clinton of New York. It was called the Caregivers Program. The idea was to allow family members of disabled veterans to care for them at home, to provide nec-

essary medical care and support in a home setting that they all wanted to be in. It was the right thing for our veterans, the right thing for our budget, and the right thing for America. Danny Akaka embraced it and became a leader on the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, providing those family members with training and modest stipends. The stipends amount to only a fraction of what would have been spent on these veterans had they been in a different setting sponsored by the government.

Well, Danny Akaka is gone, but his legacy of service lives on in millions of veterans and military families whose lives are better because of his quiet but fierce commitment.

In 1996, Senator Akaka spearheaded an effort to require reevaluation of the service records of Asian Americans who had fought in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Division during the war.

As a result of Danny Akaka's perseverance, almost two dozen Medals of Honor were bestowed posthumously on Asian-American veterans, many of them Japanese Americans. The most prominent recipient was his colleague, Senator Danny Inouye, who had lost an arm during World War II fighting for the United States in Italy. It was a long overdue justice for heroes whose courage had been largely ignored for decades because of racism, and Danny Akaka helped to make it happen.

In 1993, Danny Akaka helped to bend the arc of the moral universe another time when he and Senator Inouye successfully pushed through a resolution in which the Federal Government apologized for its role in overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy a century earlier.

As a child, Danny Akaka listened to his parents speak their Native Hawaiian language in whispers. They didn't want Danny and his seven brothers and sisters to hear them because of the Territorial law allowing children to be punished if they spoke their Native Hawaiian language in school. That little boy, little Danny Akaka, grew up to be the first Native Hawaiian ever elected to the U.S. Senate. Danny Akaka was a champion of Native Hawaiians and Native Americans, a champion of good government and the men and women who do that work in government.

He was a deeply spiritual and religious man, who once considered following his brother into the ministry but instead decided to help others in his own way as a teacher and a public servant. His was a life well lived.

Last night, I had a telephone conversation with Danny's wife, Millie Akaka—what a team, 69 years of marriage. They were just a few weeks away from celebrating their 70th anniversary. They were inseparable. He was the Senator, but she was the driving force in his public career. She managed every one of his campaigns. She knew everyone in every direction. She never forgot a name, and she was always