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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, Sustainer of humanity, thank You for faithfully providing for all of our needs. When we have trusted Your guidance, You have consistently ordered our steps, doing for us more than we can ask or imagine.

Today, give our lawmakers a generous portion of Your wisdom. Remind them that Your wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, humble, merciful, and impartial. Provide our Senators with power to carry out their responsibilities in a way that honors You.

Lord, as Memorial Day approaches, we praise You for all of the sacrifices made for this land we love.

We pray in Your great 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 legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 24, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Jelena McWilliams, of Ohio, to be Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation for a term of five years; and Jelena McWilliams, of Ohio, to be a Member of the Board of Directors of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation for a term of six years.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, we are in the midst of quite a productive week in the Senate. Yesterday, this body did its part in fulfilling an important promise to our Nation's veterans. We passed the VA MISSION Act by a wide, bipartisan margin.

Having already passed the House, this truly landmark bill will now head

to the White House where the President will soon sign it into law.

It will bring more options and greater flexibility to veterans who have spent years driving long distances to the nearest VA care facility, only to face long lines and waiting lists when they got there.

It will bring more peace of mind for veterans of all eras and their families who have faced uncertainty and limitations as their needs for care have evolved.

This legislation continues, expands, and improves the successful Veterans Choice Program that has already helped millions of veterans nationwide, including more than 23,000 Kentuckians last year alone.

Thanks to the stalwart leadership of Chairman ISAKSON and the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the hard-and-fast time and distance thresholds that kept too many veterans out of the Choice Program will soon be gone.

The providers we trust to provide top-notch care for our heroes will have clearer guidelines for prescribing opioids and more tools to attract and retain experienced professionals.

I have heard from Kentucky veterans exactly what this bill will mean to them. One wrote: "Kentucky disabled veterans greatly appreciate Congress is finally taking action to correct deficiencies in the Caregiver Program."

Another explained that the legislation "strikes the right balance to make sure we strengthen the VA system and provide veterans with the best care possible."

I thank my friend Chairman ISAKSON once more on this achievement. I am proud the Senate stepped up to the plate and showed America's veterans that, on our watch, a promise made is a promise kept.

What is more, we have already confirmed two executive branch nominees and will process two more before the end of the week. First up is Jelena McWilliams, President Trump's well-

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



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qualified pick to chair the FDIC Board of Directors.

This week, we have also seen an impressive proposal to reform the way Congress handles workplace claims, especially claims of harassment. The Democratic leader and I strongly support this proposal, as do our colleagues Senator BLUNT and Senator KLOBUCHAR.

All this comes in addition to two major Senate-passed bills that passed the House this week and are now heading to the President's desk to become law: the legislation championed by our colleague Senator JOHNSON, which will give terminally ill patients the right to try experimental drugs that are still making their way through the full FDA approval process, and the mainstreaming of Dodd-Frank regulations for small lenders and community banks, thanks to the leadership of Senator CRAPO. This legislation will help secure access to credit for middle-class families and small businesses, and the President will sign it just a few hours from now.

There is also important activity underway at the committee level. Chairman BARRASSO is leading the Environment and Public Works Committee through consideration of measures to improve and expand America's waterways infrastructure. Chairman SHELBY and the Appropriations Committee today have already begun their work on the annual funding bills. Following the committee's robust discussions, I look forward to bringing the appropriations bills they craft to the Senate floor. Earlier this week, the Armed Services Committee began considering this year's Defense authorization bill. They have a solid foundation on which to build, thanks to the historic agreement reached earlier this year that delivered the highest year-on-year increase in funding for our Armed Forces in 15 years.

One bill after another, one confirmation after another, the Senate continues to produce major accomplishments that will directly improve the lives of the American people.

TAX REFORM

Mr. President, on that subject, yesterday brought yet another piece of exciting news for American workers and middle-class families. The U.S. manufacturer United Technologies announced new plans to invest \$15 billion right here in America and hire 35,000 American workers in the next several years.

This Fortune 100 company makes a wide variety of engineered products, from jet engines to elevators. Now, because of this favorable climate for business growth, investment, and job creation, they are putting billions into research and development and capital investment and creating tens of thousands of new job openings.

To fill some of these job openings, the company is partnering with community colleges, high schools, and other workforce training programs.

This all comes on the heels of the company's other recent investments, like the new 93,000-square-foot facility in Lansing, MI, and a new 80,000-square-foot facility in Foley, AL.

What is making all this possible? According to United Technologies' announcement, "The competitive tax system resulting from U.S. tax reform is encouraging global companies, such as United Technologies, to make long-term investments in innovation in America."

This announcement is exactly the kind of headline you would expect to see in an America that is growing again. It is exactly what you would expect to happen as Republican policies continue to get Washington, DC, out of the way of American workers and job creators, and let them do what they do best—build an economy that is the envy of the rest of the world.

Yesterday's announcement was no isolated incident. We are hearing announcements like this from job creators, large and small, from national employers to Main Street businesses in my State of Kentucky and all across the country.

Back in 2013, under the Democrats' policy agenda, more than two-thirds of U.S. manufacturers reported that a hostile business climate due to taxes and regulation was a primary obstacle in their way. That was in 2013.

Today, just 16 months into this unified Republican government, fewer than one in five say that. This comeback for American manufacturing means new job openings for American workers, more prosperity for our small towns and cities, and higher take-home pay for middle-class American families.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The 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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, this morning, I would like to address four issues at varying lengths: recent news on the North Korea summit, the Russia probe, the proposed rescission of Ebola funding, and a word about the upcoming Memorial Day holiday.

NORTH KOREA

First, Madam President, on the very recent news that President Trump has canceled the planned summit with Kim Jong Un of North Korea, the fear many of us had was that the summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un would be a great show that produced nothing enduring. If a summit is to be reconstituted, the United States must show strength and achieve a concrete, verifiable, enduring elimination of Kim Jong Un's nuclear capabilities.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Second, Madam President, on the Russia probe, today on Capitol Hill, Department of Justice, FBI, and intelligence community officials are scheduled to brief the Members of Congress on a few issues related to Special Counsel Mueller's investigation into Putin's meddling in the 2016 election.

There will be two briefings—one for a House Republican partisan who has relentlessly harassed the Justice Department to reveal sources and methods to him for the sole purpose of interfering with and denigrating the special counsel's investigation. After several requests, the Department of Justice will also brief the bipartisan Gang of 8 on the same information separately later in the day.

While we believe no briefing should occur, it is a good thing that the Gang of 8 will be briefed. The overwhelming fact remains that a separate meeting with a known partisan whose only intent is to undermine the Mueller investigation makes no sense and should be called off. What is the point of a separate briefing if not to cause partisan trouble and create a he said, she said scenario? It is so damaging to the way our officials in the Justice Department have always worked.

Representative NUNES, the architect of this sham briefing, no longer deserves the benefit of the doubt. He lost all claims to objectivity long ago with his ridiculous, late-night charade at the White House and his conduct on the House Intelligence Committee, culminating in a document of innuendo and whitewashing that has recently come to be called the Nunes memo.

The reason Leader PELOSI and I requested a Gang of 8 briefing was because that is the process for Congress to review sensitive and potentially classified information—it has been the process for decades—the reason being, the Gang of 8 is already read into sensitive national security information and because the Gang of 8 is bipartisan. When one party—Representative NUNES, who so clearly wants to distort national security information for partisan purposes—asks for a solitary briefing, there shouldn't be a briefing at all.

Our preference would still be for the Justice Department to cancel the briefing today, but if it goes forward, there should be one briefing and one briefing only: bipartisan, Gang of 8.

It is also wholly inappropriate that General Kelly is at all involved in these briefings. The White House should never be allowed to interfere in an ongoing DOJ investigation, but it is absolutely beyond the pale that they are interfering in an investigation involving the President and his campaign. The person and people being investigated are being briefed on their investigation before it concludes. That doesn't happen in our justice system no matter who you are. Americans will rightly wonder why General Kelly was present. To erase their doubts, he should skip the meeting.