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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.

Holy One, Light of Light, You continue to reveal Yourself to us. Because You know our thoughts before we think them, we lay before You our lives to be purified and strengthened by the power of Your Spirit. Lord, prepare us to absorb the fragrance of Your forgiveness, as we trust You to keep us from stumbling or slipping.

Today, use our lawmakers for Your glory. May they be salt and light to this generation. Give them the knowledge and wisdom to startle the world with the confidence of their hope in You and with the generosity of their love.

We pray in Your sacred 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The majority leader is recognized.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, yesterday, the Senate advanced the nomination of Robert Wier to serve on the Eastern District Court of Kentucky by a vote of 90 to 1. This was a needless delay, but I look forward to confirming this well-qualified nominee later this morning.

Next, the Senate will turn to Fernando Rodriguez, Jr., the President's selection to be a U.S. district judge for the Southern District of Texas. Mr. Rodriguez is a graduate of Yale and the University of Texas. He earned recognition for his tireless efforts to combat human trafficking. His peers praise his work ethic and his knack for tackling complicated issues.

President Trump continues to send us impressive judicial nominees with sterling qualifications. I would urge all of my colleagues to join me in voting to promptly confirm this slate.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on another matter, Madam President, the Senate took a major step forward on behalf of our national defense. After years of harmful spending caps undermining the combat readiness of our armed services, we brokered a 2-year spending agreement that included the largest year-on-year increase in defense funding in 15 years. This significant accomplishment laid out a roadmap to deliver on the promises we make to our warfighters. Now it is time to take the next step and authorize the programs that are most needed. That is why the Senate will soon be turning to the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act.

Each year, reviewing the President's budget request provides an opportunity to hear directly from our Nation's military leaders about their needs. Months of hearings and markups allow Congress to direct resources and authorize programs, equipping our brave service men and women to confront emerging challenges.

The Armed Services Committee should be commended for their earnest, bipartisan work this year. The legislation they have produced is strong.

Following our agreement that eliminated harmful and arbitrary caps on

defense spending, this legislation will add to the process of untying our commanders' hands. It authorizes \$716 billion for national defense, enough for the Department of Defense to implement the national defense strategy and replenish and modernize America's fighting forces—as long as we meet our overall responsibility and pass the Defense appropriations bill later this year.

This authorization would expand our capabilities on the sea and in the air, provide long-term certainty and support for our All-Volunteer Force, renew oversight efforts, streamline personnel management, modernize acquisitions, and eliminate duplicative and wasteful programs. It sends a clear message that we have our warfighters' backs. How fitting, then, that it is named for our colleague, Senator McCain—a stalwart champion for our service men and women if this Chamber has ever seen one.

I look forward to discussing this legislation at length in the coming days.

JOB CREATION AND THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on a final matter, Madam President, I spoke yesterday about the new job opportunities flooding into the U.S. economy. It is all thanks to the ingenuity of American workers and job creators, with an assist from Republican policies.

Just this year, more than 1 million new jobs have been created, more than 3 million new jobs since January of 2017. The unemployment rate has sunk to 3.8 percent. It hasn't been that low in 18 years. In a big shift from the deeply uneven Obama era, communities all across America are getting in on the action. Rural areas led the whole Nation in relative job creation last year. Let me say that again. Rural areas led the whole Nation in relative job creation last year. Republicans are proud of the historic tax reform and

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



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dramatic regulatory reform that helped make that happen.

In addition to these nationwide policies, we are also delivering targeted strategies to help the specific communities that have suffered the most.

In many parts of the country, including my home State of Kentucky, the Obama-era economic lag has intertwined with another major problem: the opioid epidemic. By one estimate, in 2016, more than 2 million Americans—2 million—were addicted to opioids.

This crisis that is shattering families and communities is not an isolated medical issue. There is a reason experts describe many of these fatalities as “deaths of despair.” It is, in part, a symptom of declining opportunity and communities literally falling apart. Recent studies suggest that opioid use increased the most in precisely the communities where employment rates have fallen the most, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

Complex problems demand comprehensive solutions, and that is exactly what this Congress will continue to deliver. We are attacking this from all angles. In a strong bipartisan fashion, we passed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and the 21st Century Cures Act to bolster prevention, treatment, and law enforcement. I recently introduced the CAREER Act to help recovering addicts find jobs and stable housing to get back on their feet, and the Senate allocated billions in resources for treatment and prevention on the frontlines.

The robust Federal response is helping our first responders and professionals combat the dangers of abuse, but, as is always the case, major challenges are rarely solved here in Washington. Congress can provide resources and support to vulnerable communities, but often we do the most good by getting government’s foot off the brake and letting American innovators get back to business.

For example, I recently heard some great news from one private sector problem-solver in my home State of Kentucky. In my hometown, US WorldMeds has spent the last 15 years working to bring relief to millions of Americans touched by opioid addiction. They have been working on introducing a medicine in the United States to help ease the symptoms of withdrawal. Just last month, we got word that they have received FDA approval. US WorldMeds’ CEO, Breck Jones, believes this nonnarcotic medicine can help more addicts kick the habit altogether.

I had the opportunity to visit US WorldMeds’ facility last year. I was so impressed by what I saw. Now that team can scale up their efforts and begin getting their treatment into the hands of Americans whose lives it could help transform—all of it made easier when Washington offers targeted support where it is needed but mostly gets out of the way of the innovators. Talk about a winning combination.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert Earl Wier, of Kentucky, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Kentucky.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, over the past few weeks, we have all endured the increasingly novel legal theories dreamt up by the President and his lawyers regarding the special counsel’s investigation into the Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Over the weekend, we learned the President’s lawyers wrote a memo that asserted unfettered authority over all Federal investigations. Rudy Giuliani actually suggested that the President could have “shot James Comey” and not been indicted or prosecuted because, according to him, “in no case can [the President] be subpoenaed or indicted.” Is that incredible?

The President himself tweeted yesterday that he had the absolute right to pardon himself and that the appointment of the special counsel was unconstitutional, despite the fact that he regularly called for a special counsel to look into Hillary Clinton during the 2016 campaign. The two-facedness, the hypocrisy of saying Hillary should have it but, no, it is unconstitutional now that it applies to him—how can the American people tolerate that kind of thinking in a President? This morning, again, President Trump faulted Attorney General Sessions for recusing himself from the probe instead of helping to end it.

The President’s tweet regarding Attorney General Sessions this morning is part of a pattern where the President

admits out loud and shamelessly that he was trying to take steps to end the Russia probe. First, in a television interview, the President admitted that stopping the Russia probe was his motivation for firing Director Comey. Now he says he would never have hired Sessions if he had known he was going to recuse himself, even though recusal was required by Department of Justice rules.

This latest stunning admission is just more evidence that the President may have something to hide. If he did nothing wrong, President Trump should welcome a thorough investigation to exonerate him.

Each of the claims that I have mentioned has the same theme: That the President believes he is above the law. Of course, we know the idea that anyone in America is above the law is antithetical to the very idea of America, antithetical to the very idea of democracy, and antithetical to what millions of Americans have fought for and hundreds of thousands—millions—have died for in the course of our history. We don’t have a King. We have a President, bound by the same Constitution and the same laws that govern the average American citizen.

The Founding Fathers didn’t set out to create a monarchy; they set out to construct a system of government entirely distinct from the monarchies of their time. That is why they installed checks and balances and devolved power between three branches to ensure the liberty of the people and guard against the encroachment of tyranny. That was their great gift to us, and their ideas have kept American democracy alive for two and one-half centuries and the admiration of the world for an equal period of time. Trump is besmirching all of that with his recent activities.

So despite what the President and his allies may feel about his authority or his absolution from legal repercussions, the Constitution and the founding principles of our country tell us he is dead wrong. President Trump: We are not a monarchy. You are not a King. We are a constitutional democracy, so act like it.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Madam President, on another matter, this week the Senate is processing a number of judges. Some of these judges are noncontroversial. As I have said in the past, Democrats are committed to working with the majority to process these noncontroversial nominees, but there are several highly controversial nominees after this slate that bear attention.

Tomorrow, the Senate Judiciary Committee will consider the nomination of David Porter for the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, despite the fact that Senator CASEY has not returned a blue slip on Mr. Porter, who was nominated by the White House over the home State Senator’s repeated objections. Mr. Porter, like so many of the nominees submitted by this President,