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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CINDY HYDE-SMITH, a Senator from the State of Mississippi.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, thank You for sustaining our Nation from the beginning of its existence until this present moment. If You had not been with us, we would have been devoured by our enemies. You kept us from being overwhelmed by the raging waters of anarchy and the fury of pestilences. May the way You have led us in the past make us confident about our future.

Lord, be the helper of our lawmakers. Provide them with the wisdom, power, and grace needed for the living of these days.

Forgive our sins of commission and omission. Remind us that all that is necessary for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing.

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, June 26, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CINDY HYDE-SMITH, a Senator from the State of Mississippi, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

FARM BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, last evening the Senate voted overwhelmingly to advance H.R. 2—the farm bill. The reason it has reached the floor in its current form—ready for consideration, amendments, and, ultimately, passage by the full Senate—is the leadership of Chairman PAT ROBERTS and Ranking Member DEBBIE STABENOW. They have carried on the committee's proud tradition of focusing on substance and putting partisanship aside.

As the senior Senator from Kentucky, I know exactly how important this legislation is to agricultural communities in my home State and around the Nation. Kentucky has 12.8 million acres dedicated to agriculture. That includes about \$1 billion in soybean production last year alone, about three-quarters of a billion dollars in corn, and hundreds of millions of dollars in the production of hay and tobacco, just to name a few.

These crops are only part of the story. Our leading agricultural commodity is poultry—a billion-dollar-plus industry that employs about 7,000 Ken-

tuckians on its own. These are just a few examples of what Kentucky farmers bring to the country and to the world.

Despite the impressive scale, we are a State that is dominated by small farms. They form the backbone of rural communities throughout my State. But our farm families and those across rural America face a lot of uncertainty: natural disasters, from droughts to floods, unstable world markets, and falling commodity prices.

Earlier this year, the USDA Economic Research Service forecasted that net farm income is in the process of falling to a 12-year low—a 12-year low. The farmers who feed and support this country are counting on us to provide the predictability and certainty of a long-term farm bill.

My colleagues and I on the Agriculture Committee have produced a farm bill that shows America's farmers that we understand their situation, share their concerns, and are taking action to address them.

My colleagues from every corner of the country can be proud of this legislation. First and foremost, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 strengthens the safety measures that directly help commodity producers as they confront low prices. It also seizes a number of opportunities to invest in the future of American agriculture and rural communities.

I am particularly excited about the provision that would empower farmers to begin cultivating industrial hemp, a crop that could play a key role going forward in Kentucky's economy and in the Nation's.

The bill also focuses on rural broadband, rural water infrastructure, and the fight against the opioid epidemic that has hit rural America very hard.

From top to bottom, this farm bill takes serious steps to ensure the future of American agriculture—for the sake of our farmers, our rural communities, and the entire country.

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



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This week my colleagues will have ample opportunity to consider the legislation before us. In a few days I hope they will join me in voting to pass it.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, it has been a little over 6 months since the passage of tax reform delivered measurable relief to working families and job creators, 6 months since Republicans implemented a simpler 21st century framework to help unleash a new generation of success stories, and 6 months since updated tax brackets and withholding tables provided for some 90 percent of American wage earners to take home more pay.

Thanks to lower tax rates, the IRS is withholding less of workers' paychecks. Because we doubled the standard deduction, married couples will benefit from what amounts to a new zero-percent tax bracket for the first \$24,000 they earn. And parents are looking forward to the bigger child tax credit they can claim going forward—up to \$2,000 per qualifying child.

These tax cuts are just the shot in the arm our economy needed, and they are exactly what middle-class families and workers deserved. At least that is what Republicans believe.

Our Democratic colleagues seem to see things quite differently. They don't think that \$2,000—that is the average estimated tax cut this year for a family of four earning the median family income—seems like very much money, as far as they are concerned.

After all, every single Democrat voted against giving American families these tax cuts. They figured Washington knew how to spend the money better than the taxpayers who earned it. Of course, the bill became law without Democrats' help. Since then, they have set about trying to persuade middle-class families that getting to keep more of their own money is a terrible thing, so they should support Democrats' efforts to repeal tax reform.

I am glad I don't have to try and make that case. It looks like more take-home pay for workers is already beginning to have ripple effects throughout the U.S. economy. Fueled in part by our Republican policies, consumer confidence in 2018 reached its highest level since November of 2000.

Sure enough, just last month retail sales growth doubled the gains that experts had forecast and shot up at the fastest pace in half a year. Here is the L.A. Times headline: "Retail sales post sharp gains in May, signaling a surge in U.S. economic growth." That is the L.A. Times.

That is more take-home pay for American taxpayers, more prosperity for American retailers, more demand for American goods and services, and thus, more demand for American workers.

This is what we call a virtuous circle, and Republicans' commonsense agenda

is helping to make it happen. Our Democratic colleagues may want to put Washington's foot back on the brake by repealing tax reform and piling up more regulations, but they aren't just arguing with those of us across the aisle. They are arguing with the facts. They are arguing with the data. They are arguing with American families who are keeping more of their own money. They are arguing with the prosperity our agenda is already helping to unleash.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 6

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I understand that there is a bill at the desk due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6) to provide for opioid use disorder prevention, recovery, and treatment, and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, on appropriations, the Senate is continuing the process.

I thank Chairman SHELBY, Ranking Member LEAHY, and Leader MCCONNELL for their work in helping move this process forward.

It has been a long time since the Senate has successfully processed appropriations through the regular order. It requires cooperation on the committee, cooperation amongst the committee staff, and cooperation here on the floor with the two leaders, and that is happening. If we are looking to work in a bipartisan way, this is, probably, the best sprout of bipartisanship that has bloomed in a long time in this body.

The fact that the parties are working together to prevent nongermane amendments that are intended just to create ruckus and the fact that even germane amendments that are regarded as poison pills are not being added to the bills here in the Senate

really bodes well for cooperation. I wish it were the same in the House, where it is strictly a partisan process. The fact that the Senate is working together on appropriations bodes well for future legislation, including one farm bill that some people have an interest in who are in this body—many of us, actually—including, of course, the senior Senator from the great State of Kansas.

I hope this appropriations process can continue this way—with bipartisanship, knocking out poison pill amendments, sticking together, and getting a good bill done. The fact that yesterday, I think there were—how many votes?—just a handful of votes against the first minibus of three of the Appropriations Committee's bills bodes well for the future.

I would also caution to say there may be some extraneous forces, some even down the other side of Pennsylvania Avenue, that might want to blow this whole thing up. If we can stick together, we can make this happen in a good way, for the good of the country, in terms of the specific bills and in terms of bringing us back together again to get things done.

That is the optimistic note of the morning. Maybe we will have more.

FAMILY SEPARATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, on immigration, in the past few weeks, it has not been so optimistic. The Trump administration has created a humanitarian crisis at our southern border through its cruel family separation policy. An Executive order signed by the President last week has barely undone the damage. It largely leaves the original policy intact and raises a whole series of unresolved questions.

Those in the administration have a lot of questions to answer, and it is only they who can straighten this out. Legislation might be a good thing, but we all know the path to legislation is fraught with peril. Having legislation pass the House, pass the Senate, and be signed by the President hasn't happened in a while. In the meantime, while people grapple with legislation—and I encourage people to talk to one another—we have a lot of questions that the administration must answer: How many children are separated from their parents? Where are those children? Where are the parents? What kind of care are these kids getting? How are they holding up?

I saw on one of the TV shows this morning a little girl, who asked: Where is my mommy? Where is my mommy? She was a young girl who was, maybe, 4 years old.

That is not the America any of us—regardless of our party, regardless of our political philosophy—believe in. We see that in other countries that are much crueler and less democratic than we. So we need these questions answered by the administration quickly.

The second thing we need is a plan. The administration, the President, and