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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.

Eternal God, this day our hearts rise up to meet You, and our lips extoll Your wonderful works on the Earth. Great is Your faithfulness.

Today may Your peace go with our lawmakers wherever You lead them, enabling them to feel the wonder of Your sacred presence. Lord, give them the wisdom to find true life in serving others, becoming Your ambassadors to our Nation and world. Inspire the hearts of our Senators to obey Your precepts, as they discover the delight of doing Your will. Help them to see that their well-being is inextricably bound to the well-being of their neighbors. Inspire them to share compassion, patience, and courage.

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 (Mr. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

HONOR FLIGHT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is my privilege today to welcome a special group of visitors to Washington. Thanks to Honor Flight Bluegrass, more Kentucky veterans are touching

down today in our Nation's Capital. They are coming to remember fallen comrades and to visit the memorials dedicated to their own service.

Earlier this month, I was lucky enough to spend time with a flight of World War II veterans who arrived in time for the 74th anniversary of D-Day. Today's flight includes veterans of World War II, along with Korea and Vietnam. On behalf of the Commonwealth and all Americans, I am proud to thank them for their service.

Next week, we celebrate our Independence Day. So let's not forget that the freedoms we enjoy come at a cost. Let's take time to thank the heroes who have paid it and those who continue to pay it today.

FARM BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today the Senate will continue our work on the farm bill. The bipartisan collaboration of Chairman ROBERTS and Ranking Member STABENOW has given all Senators the opportunity to review and consider this important legislation.

Now we start the amendment process. Ideas from many of our colleagues have already been included in the Roberts substitute amendment, but the bill managers are open to considering additional amendments.

We will start with the Thune amendment regarding the Conservation Reserve Program and go on from there, but it remains our intention to finish consideration of the bill this week. This bill is too important to let it languish. This is our chance to support the farm families, producers, and rural communities on whom our Nation depends. Make no mistake about it. They need that support.

American farmers are staring down falling commodity prices and unstable markets and living under the constant threat of droughts, floods, or other natural disasters. They are looking for

certainty and predictability. This farm bill delivers.

"The fact is, without the solid foundation of the farm bill and the certainty it provides, many farmers and ranchers would not be able to get operating loans to farm for another year."

Those are the words of the president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, which passionately supports this bill. So do the agricultural equipment manufacturers. So do the National Association of Counties. So do many other groups dedicated to agriculture, business, hunger prevention, and the health of rural America.

That is because this legislation provides the immediate assistance and stability that farmers count on to keep feeding and supporting this country right now and because it will empower our farmers and ranchers to invest for the future.

Chairman ROBERTS described this perfectly yesterday. Here is what he said: "It takes the government providing tools and then getting out of the producers' way."

On the latter point, I am most excited about a provision in this bill that will clear the way for the legal farming of industrial hemp by removing current roadblocks that prevent farmers, in Kentucky and around the country, from capitalizing on this promising crop.

Since the 1970s, except in a few limited cases, American farmers have not been able to grow industrial hemp in their fields. That doesn't mean consumers aren't buying hemp—far from it. Hemp is in everything from health products to home insulation. The global market for hemp is estimated to consist of more than 25,000 products. According to one estimate, back in 2016, U.S. retail sales of hemp products totaled approximately \$688 million. Last year alone, Kentucky hemp recorded more than \$16 million in product sales through the State's pilot program.

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



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So American consumers are buying hemp, but thanks to heavy-handed regulations, the only option at scale is importing hemp from foreign producers.

Enough is enough. Industrial hemp is a completely different plant than its illicit cousin. It is time we get Washington out of the way and let American farmers meet the growing demand of American consumers.

In the last farm bill, I championed a hemp pilot program that opened the door to some exploration. I recently heard from a fifth-generation Kentucky farmer from Garrard County who participates in the program. Here is what he said: "We had no idea what it would turn into." He said: Growing hemp has been "career-defining for me, beyond anything I'd ever imagined."

At a time when the farm economy is struggling, it is encouraging to hear such enthusiasm for a new potential cash crop.

Another farmer from Marion County wrote and asked Congress to "continue your efforts until we can grow, research, and market this crop freely without undue restriction. We have barely scratched the surface of the countless benefits that come from this plant."

Hemp will be a bright spot for our future. It is full of economic potential in Kentucky and the Nation. So we should pass the farm bill without delay. Let's address farmers' immediate needs. Let's give them new tools to help secure their future. Let's get Washington out of the way in the cases where outdated policies are holding them back.

The bill before us is a prime example of the good that can come when we work together. I look forward to the Senate passing it for Kentucky's farm families. So let's continue our work to get it done.

TAX REFORM

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this week I have been discussing how the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is creating breathing room in family budgets. Yesterday I focused on the tax cuts themselves. Lower rates, a doubled standard deduction, a bigger child tax credit add up to serious savings for middle-class families.

Today I want to discuss the permanent pay raises, bonuses, and new benefits that tax reform has enabled U.S. businesses to provide for their workers. Remember, this is exactly what our Democratic colleagues insisted tax reform would not—would not—bring about. To quote my friend, the Democratic leader, right here on the Senate floor in December: "There is nothing about this tax bill that is suited to the needs of the American worker."

Well, Republicans knew better. We listened to the economists who explained in an open letter that "the question isn't whether workers will be helped by a corporate tax rate reduction—it's how much" they will be helped.

The reason is simple. American workers can only thrive if the American businesses that employ them are given the tools to compete and win on the world stage. Here is what they need to compete: a 21st century tax code.

Most economists agree that the real impact of tax reform on workers' wages is a long-term proposition. The wage gains will roll in over the months and years ahead, but it is remarkable how quickly a number of American businesses made immediate investments in their workers.

At Charter Communications, which employs 95,000 people Nationwide, the base wage has already risen to \$15 per hour because of tax reform.

Beginning in April, CVS implemented a new, fully paid parental leave program for full-time employees because of tax reform.

Educational opportunities are expanding for nearly 400,000 McDonald's employees across the country, after tax reform allowed the company to ramp up tuition assistance.

Tax reform has enabled LHC Group, a major healthcare employer with more than 50 locations and 3,600 employees in Kentucky alone, to expand raises for its employees and to grow the 401(k) options the company sponsors.

Workers at businesses of every shape and size are being helped all across our country: bonuses at a grain merchandiser in Chester, MT; a quarter-million-dollar expansion plan that creates 20 new jobs at a roofing company in Massillon, OH. It appears tax reform is very well-suited to the needs of American workers after all.

It is well-suited to the needs of hard-working parents who pocketed thousand-dollar bonuses to help with grocery bills and summer camp costs. It is well-suited to the needs of young Americans on the first rungs of the economic ladder, whose employer can now offer more help with continuing education.

This might come as a surprise to our Democratic friends who opposed tax reform at every turn. It certainly doesn't surprise those of us who fought for the American people.

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.

AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION ACT OF 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 2, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 483, H.R. 2, a bill to provide for the reform and continuation of agricultural and other programs of the Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2023, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time is expired.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION ACT OF 2018

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2) to provide for the reform and continuation of agricultural and other programs of the Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2023, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

AMENDMENT NO. 3224

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.)

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I call up the substitute amendment No. 3224.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kansas [Mr. ROBERTS] proposes an amendment numbered 3224.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

AMENDMENT NO. 3134 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3224

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I call up the Thune amendment No. 3134.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. McCONNELL], for Mr. THUNE, proposed an amendment numbered 3134 to amendment No. 3224.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To modify conservation reserve program provisions)

In section 2103, strike subsections (b) and (c) and insert the following:

(b) SPECIFIED ACTIVITIES PERMITTED.—Section 1233(b) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3833(b)) is amended—

(1) by striking paragraphs (1), (2), (3), and (5);

(2) by redesignating paragraph (4) as subparagraph (C) and indenting appropriately;

(3) by inserting before subparagraph (C) (as so redesignated) the following: