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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 25, 2018, at 4 p.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2018

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.

Our Father, the center of our joy, we thank You that You are in the midst of life's battles with us, bringing good even from the abnormalities of our pilgrimage. Lord, we are grateful that through the struggles and tears, You stand within the shadows, keeping watch over Your people.

Lord, even though our lawmakers may not always know how the pieces fit together, we are grateful that they can still strive with thankful hearts to do Your will. May they remember Your command in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks, for this is God's will for your life."

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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

MARSHALL COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday morning, senseless violence struck the community of Benton in Western Kentucky. A shooting at Marshall County High School has claimed two lives, left more than a dozen injured, and thrust an entire community into shock and grief. Such a tragedy is every parent's worst nightmare. School should be a haven where students, faculty, and staff can learn and work without fear of violence.

Elaine and I send our thoughts to the victims, their families and friends, and the entire Marshall County High School community.

Last night, Kentuckians came together in more than 20 prayer vigils and services across the region. Although few of us can begin to understand their grief, an entire nation stands in solidarity at their side.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate took another important step in confirming President Trump's qualified nominees. In strong bipartisan fashion, we confirmed Jerome Powell to serve as Chairman of the Federal Reserve by a vote of 84 to 13.

Mr. Powell was a fine choice to lead the Federal Reserve System. His public service and private sector work alike have received accolades from across the political spectrum.

He joined the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve in 2012. He has

demonstrated an expert grasp of monetary policy and a commitment to improving the Fed's transparency and accountability to Congress and to the public. I enjoyed meeting with him during the confirmation process and look forward to his service in this new position.

The position of Fed Chairman is integral to the health of the U.S. economy. Washington must empower the American people to create prosperity through sound policy that gets the government out of the way of workers and job creators. Jay Powell is up to the task. I was proud to vote to confirm him yesterday.

The Senate also voted yesterday to advance the nomination of another highly qualified nominee—Alex Azar, who will serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

In his impressive testimony before the Finance Committee, Mr. Azar discussed his intention to confront head-on the opioid crisis that is hurting so many families across our country, including in my home State of Kentucky. He made clear that he will place an important priority on prevention, education, and enforcement to halt the advance of this scourge.

But he recognizes we need effective, compassionate treatment options for those who are seeking recovery, and for all Americans, he will work to expand access to high-quality, affordable healthcare options.

His distinguished record, including prior HHS service as Deputy Secretary and private sector work, shows he is the right man for the job. It is vital that this Department be headed by a

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



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leader with Mr. Azar's extensive qualifications and excellent reputation. He will be responsible for overseeing \$1.13 trillion in Department spending, supervising critical research, and administering and reforming programs that touch millions of American lives, such as Medicare and Medicaid.

I look forward to voting soon in support of his confirmation.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the rising tide of economic optimism I have been highlighting on the floor is not showing any signs of subsiding.

Yesterday alone, three of the Nation's largest companies announced major new investments in the U.S. economy and workforce. Each said that their decisions were made possible by the improved business climate created by the landmark Tax Code overhaul that Congress passed last year.

First, Verizon announced plans to invest a chunk of its tax reform savings right back into its employees. Next month, about 155,000 Verizon workers, including senior management, will receive stock bonuses valued around \$2,500. Additional savings will also go to expanded philanthropy and infrastructure investments right here in America.

Further, the Walt Disney Company announced a new investment of at least \$175 million in its U.S. workforce. Over 125,000 employees will receive cash bonuses, and Disney will invest \$50 million in an employee education program designed to help hourly employees access higher education and vocational training.

JPMorgan Chase announced a \$20 billion, 5-year comprehensive investment plan to support economic growth and American workers. That plan includes permanent raises for 22,000 employees, hundreds of new bank branches across the country, thousands of new jobs, expanded philanthropy, and an increase in loans for affordable housing and small business development.

Just this morning, Starbucks has announced it is permanently raising pay and conferring new benefits, like one-time stock bonuses and expanded paid leave. This major investment in its U.S. workforce will affect more than 150,000 employees.

So the good news about tax reform and its benefits is rolling in almost faster than I can keep up with it. In retrospect, the surprise here is not that this tax relief has boosted the American economy; the real surprise is that those who opposed tax reform didn't see it coming.

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 Alex Michael Azar II, of Indiana, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we have 14 days, by our own established deadline, to do something about the Dreamers issue—about DACA.

Why do we find ourselves at this place? Because on September 5 of last year, President Trump, as well as Attorney General Sessions, announced the end of the DACA protection program as of March 5 this year. The 780,000 young people who were undocumented in the United States and who came here as children were given a chance by President Obama to stay legally, be able to work legally, and not fear deportation. For the most part, they are students and workers who are a vital part of the community, and they have done good things in their lives and promised to do even more.

This issue was created by the decision made by President Trump to put an end to this program. He made that decision. He also challenged Congress. He said: If we are going to end this Executive order, do something. Pass a law.

Well, here we are, just about at the fifth month out of the 6-month period he gave us to get down to work, and nothing has happened. Some of us have been working on this issue, trying to address it on a bipartisan basis in the hope that this Republican-controlled Congress would join with enough Democrats to solve the problem that the President presented.

I have worked with five of my colleagues—three Democrats and three Republicans—to craft a bill that we believe addresses the issue in a fair way. Compromise was included in that bill—some that I didn't like at all, but that is the nature of a compromise and bipartisanship.

We presented this bill to our colleagues, and we also attended a meeting on January 9 with President Trump in which he addressed this issue. Here it was, 4 months after he issued the challenge to Congress, and he basically told us: It is time to get this done. He said to us—and this was televised, so you can check my remarks if there is any question about what I am saying.

He said to us, basically: Send me a bill, and I will sign it. I will take the political heat on this issue.

Then the Republican leader on the House side, KEVIN MCCARTHY said that it ought to include the following four elements: first, DACA and the Dreamers; second, border security; third, family reunification issues; and finally, the visa lottery system, the diversity system that we had established years ago.

That is when I sat down and said to my fellow Senators—Democrats and Republicans, our little gang: We have to get this done. The President has challenged us, and he said that he is prepared to move forward if we can come up with a response. So we did. We came to an agreement among ourselves—the six Senators who had been meeting.

We presented it to the President through Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM of South Carolina, a Republican, on January 11. He rejected it.

So as of today, we really don't have a bill before us, and we are starting anew with a conversation about what to do to meet the President's challenge but equally, if not more importantly, to say to the 780,000 young people and those who were eligible to apply: This is what your future will be.

We have had our ups and downs, and it was a rocky weekend just a few days ago relative to funding the government and whether we were going to take up this issue. I thought it ended on a positive note when Senator MCCONNELL came to the floor and made an express promise to this Chamber—to Members on both sides of the aisle. I am going to try to characterize it, and I think this is accurate. Check the RECORD, if you don't think I say it quite right. But he said: If we have not reached an agreement on this issue by February 8, at that point, we will open a process on the floor of the Senate with what he characterized as a level playing field and an open amendment process. That, to me, is an opportunity, but I hope we can avoid that opportunity and reach an agreement, as he asked us to, by February 8. We have 14 days left. I would like to involve the House in this conversation so that we might reach a common agreement, but unfortunately, they are on recess this week. Those of us who were sitting and talking about it don't have a chance to get together with them. However, I am heartened by the fact that a number of my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle are going to join a number on the Democratic side of the aisle this afternoon and start what we hope will be a productive process to reach a bipartisan agreement and do it in a timely way, as suggested and challenged by Senator MCCONNELL. To achieve this goal, I think we understand we are going to have to be mindful of one another and mindful of the realities we face. There are a lot of issues relative to immigration. The list is pretty lengthy. There are important issues that should be considered.