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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM COTTON, a Senator from the State of Arkansas.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, You are our God. We can stay composed even in a storm because of Your presence. We need You and stay thirsty for You, for Your power and glory uplift us.

Give our lawmakers the gift of Your steadfast love, blessing them beyond all that they can ask or imagine. May they praise Your Name each day. As they depend on You, empower them to confront life's challenges and hardships, knowing that they are never alone. Lord, satisfy their souls with good things, transforming the mundane into the meaningful. Purify their hearts, revealing to them Your plans for the prosperity of our Nation and world.

We pray in Your loving 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, July 25, 2018.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable TOM COTTON, a Senator from the State of Arkansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I spoke yesterday about the bipartisan cooperation that has made it possible for us to return to a regular appropriations process. Collaboration got the four measures we are now considering through the subcommittee and full committee process, thanks to the efforts of Chairman SHELBY, Senator LEAHY, and the subcommittee leaders, Senators MURKOWSKI, COLLINS, HOEVEN, and LANKFORD.

On the floor, bipartisanship let us turn to legislation by consent and kick off the amendment process with several votes yesterday. If we can keep it up, we will soon take four more big steps toward our goal of funding the Federal Government the right way and avoiding another omnibus.

Yesterday, I mentioned that the legislation before us addresses two pressing national needs: rebuilding America's infrastructure and bolstering the fight against opioids. But that is far from the whole story. These measures cover about one-eighth of the total discretionary spending for next year. They fund a long list of key services that Americans depend on every day—everything from food safety inspections to child nutrition programs, to the Forest Service and national parks. Communities in all 50 States are connected to this legislation.

Here are a few of the provisions that will be particular cause for celebration in my home State of Kentucky: \$37 billion toward rural development, including support for rural businesses, and loans and grants to improve rural infrastructure for electricity, telephone, and broadband internet in communities in Kentucky and all across the country; another \$1 billion in grants to help communities invest in highways, bridges, and other infrastructure projects, with a guarantee that 30 percent of this funding would go into rural areas; more funding for the Abandoned Mine Land Pilot Program, which helps communities reclaim abandoned coal mines and put that land to better use; more funding and a sharper Federal focus on controlling the evasive Asian carp that threaten local prosperity and water safety in Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley in Western Kentucky; and more help for the Kentuckians who battle the scourge of opioids every day.

The legislation funds the FDA's efforts to intercept illegal drugs, the DEA's program for high-intensity trafficking areas, and increased training for first responders.

It also contains a provision I secured directing the Department of Housing and Urban Development to encourage more access to transitional housing opportunities for individuals recovering from substance abuse disorder.

I could go on. The ways the bill before us would assist families and communities across Kentucky are practically countless, and the same is true for every State in our country.

That is why every Member understands the importance of appropriations. Funding the Federal Government—matching resources with urgent challenges—is one of Congress's most important responsibilities. I am proud of the appropriations process that is underway, and I am especially proud of all of the ways the resulting legislation will deliver for the American people.

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



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JOB GROWTH

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, we are discussing the difference between rhetoric and results when it comes to our economy. Yesterday, I described how my Democratic friends spent the Obama years talking about the importance of rebuilding American manufacturing. They talked about it, but it is the actions of this united Republican government that have made it easier for manufacturers to expand and hire.

It is on our watch that optimism among U.S. manufacturers has hit the highest level that one survey has ever recorded. Well, it turns out that there are quite a few areas where this Republican government is helping to deliver victories that our Democratic friends spent 8 years talking about.

In his 2010 State of the Union Address, President Obama proclaimed that job growth would be the No. 1 focus of the coming year. He said that “the true engine of job creation in this country will always be America’s businesses” and that government’s role was to “create the conditions necessary for businesses to expand and to hire more workers.”

Recognizing American job creators as the true engines of prosperity and giving them room to succeed sounds good to me. It sounded good to almost everyone, in fact.

But once again, the policies didn’t match the rhetoric. Instead, the Obama administration twice set all-time records for the number of pages in the Federal Register, and those pages had consequences. By constantly moving the regulatory goalposts, government eroded the certainty businesses need to invest and to hire.

Washington, DC, restricted farmers’ and ranchers’ control over water on their own property. Bureaucrats overwhelmed small banks and credit unions with a rule book designed for Wall Street, and an outdated Federal Tax Code held back job creation and made America much less competitive.

On Democrats’ watch, Americans had to wait out an economic “recovery” that was insufficient, slow, and left whole parts of the country way behind.

Remember the rhetoric and then remember the facts. Republicans have always agreed that job creation must be a top priority, but we have a better idea about how to actually help make it happen. The Republican Congress has used the Congressional Review Act to slash 17 burdensome regulations. That is on top of the administration’s own Executive actions. We have passed, and the President has signed, major changes to Obamacare and to Dodd-Frank, and we passed generational tax reform that puts more hard-earned money in the pockets of working families and gives job creators more flexibility.

So what is happening on our watch? Just a few days ago, the number of Americans newly filing for unemployment benefits hit the lowest level in

more than 48 years. Let me say that again. Newly filing for unemployment benefits hit its lowest level in more than 48 years. Here is how CNN characterized the Labor Department’s most recent jobs report:

The U.S. economy keeps adding jobs at a blistering pace. . . . The job market is so good, many people who had previously given up looking are starting to look again.

According to Gallup, the percentage of Americans saying now is a good time to find a quality job hit its highest level in 17 years. That is not just rhetoric but actual results, due to the hard work of American workers and job creators, with an assist from this Republican government.

Unfortunately, this pro-growth agenda hasn’t gotten much support from across the aisle. Not a single Democrat—not one—voted for the tax reform that helped to turn rhetoric about jobs into actual jobs.

There was hardly any Democratic support for the regulatory housecleaning that has given job creators more confidence to stay on American soil, grow their businesses, and add jobs.

So all of us agree with the rhetoric, but not everyone supported the policy agenda that has helped to deliver these results for the American people.

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.

INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, FINANCIAL SERVICES, AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2019

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 6147, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6147) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Shelby amendment No. 3399, in the nature of a substitute.

Murkowski amendment No. 3400 (to amend No. 3399), of a perfecting nature.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, we are officially on day No. 2 of the second tranche of an appropriations package. We have before us the Interior Subcommittee’s appropriations bill, the Financial Services, the T-HUD—Transportation, Housing and Urban Development—and Agriculture. So it is a good combination. It is a good package. It is a strong package. It is a series of appropriations bills that moved through the full Appropriations Committee several months back. Most of these bills advanced either unanimously, as the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee’s bill did, or with a strong bipartisan show of support out of committee.

For those who have followed the appropriations process over the years, you know it is somewhat unprecedented to be able to advance these spending bills through the full committee process, much less to do so in a manner that surely shows the bipartisan approach this committee has taken in this fiscal year.

I acknowledge and recognize the work of Chairman SHELBY and his vice chairman, Senator LEAHY from Vermont, for the truly collaborative process they have encouraged all of us to work toward.

There was an agreement, an understanding, that our appropriations process had not been the model of good governance, of legislating, that we would have liked it to have been, that we would expect it to be, and that our colleagues—much less the American public—would expect it to be.

With a very determined effort, the group of appropriators who came together earlier made a very strong and firm commitment that we were going to get this process back on track. With the leadership of the chairman and the vice chairman, that is exactly where we are. We were able to move a smaller minibus, if you will, a month ago. That is now moving through that conference process. It is not an easy process, we recognize, but nothing around here is easy. If it is worth doing and doing well, it is going to take a little bit of work. We have done that work, and to be here on the 25th of July—to be at a place at which the Senate is poised to advance seven of the appropriations bills out of the Senate—is really quite unprecedented.

In my remarks on the floor on Monday evening, I noted that this was the first time since 2010 we had seen an Interior Appropriations Subcommittee’s bill being brought to the floor of the U.S. Senate. That is a long time. That is too long a time not to have had a fulsome process, a process wherein we not only demonstrate the good work that we as appropriators have done but wherein our colleagues who are not on the committee also view that good work, weigh in, offer their thoughts, offer their amendments, and are a part of the broader, whole process.