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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.

Almighty God, the Earth belongs to You and everything in it. Even when wrong seems overwhelming, You continue to rule. Create in our lawmakers a hunger and thirst for integrity and honesty. Give them pure hearts and truthful lips, accompanied by a passion to glorify You.

Lord, provide them wisdom to live for the honor of Your Name as they remember that they are Your ambassadors. May they look to You for help, knowing that You surround them with the shield of Your Divine favor.

We pray in Your Holy 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. SASSE). The majority leader is recognized.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this evening, President Trump will deliver his first State of the Union Address. As tens of millions of Americans tune in, he will continue a time-honored tradition by taking stock of the past year and laying out his vision for the future.

For anyone who has been reading the headlines over the last year and paying

attention to the issues that directly impact middle-class families, the state of our Union will not come as a surprise.

Unemployment is low and consumer confidence is high. The news is packed with all the pay raises, special bonuses, expanded benefits, and new investments that are flowing into American households and communities because of a landmark tax reform law that Congress passed and the President signed in December.

Hundreds of companies have announced that a more competitive tax code is allowing them to quickly ramp up the amount they can invest in their own American workers. This includes some of our country's largest employers.

Walmart is increasing its starting wage for all hourly associates, expanding maternity and parental leave, and giving \$1,000 bonuses to its own employees. Disney, AT&T, and Bank of America are giving \$1,000 tax reform bonuses to more than 100,000 workers each. The list goes on. It is not just the big guys who are benefiting.

Yesterday afternoon, here on the floor, I talked about Verst Logistics in Walton, KY, which paid its full-time workers bonuses as a result of tax reform. I shared the story of a woman who works for Verst. She fought back tears as she explained what this bonus would do for her family. Money had gotten tight around the holidays, but while she and her husband had saved enough to give their five children a merry Christmas, mom and dad were planning to go without gifts of their own. But because Congress seized this opportunity to modernize our Tax Code, she got her very own tax reform bonus. With that extra money she and her husband were able to buy each other Christmas presents after all and enjoy a nice dinner out, to boot.

I can share these stories all day. I am so proud that Congress and the President teamed up to take money out of

Washington's pocket and put it back in the pockets of hard-working Americans who earned it.

Some of our Democratic colleagues don't seem to feel that way. They all voted against a law that would raise take-home pay for American families, who have spent a decade struggling not just to get ahead but oftentimes to simply stay afloat. Several have made news in recent days by scoffing at these bonuses, pay raises, and new benefits.

My friends the Democratic leaders in both the Senate and the House have both used the word "crumbs"—"crumbs." One of their colleagues, the former chair of the DNC, said she doesn't think \$1,000 "goes very far for almost anyone." So \$1,000 doesn't go far for almost anyone? That might be true in New York or San Francisco, but it sure isn't true in Kentucky. I think taking that argument to most kitchen tables would get you laughed out of the room.

Of course, the immediate raises, bonuses, and worker benefits are far from the whole story. Tax reform will also deliver direct relief to middle-class families across America by cutting our tax rates and doubling the standard deduction.

A typical family of four earning a median income will get to keep more than \$2,000 of their own money that they would have otherwise sent to the IRS next year.

Furthermore, the law repeals ObamaCare's punitive individual mandate tax, and soon many Americans are likely to see lower utility rates as utility companies pass along their savings to consumers.

Just yesterday, two major Kentucky utilities asked the Kentucky Public Service Commission for permission to pass \$180 million in tax reform savings on to their customers, which could lower their bills this year. That is particularly important to low-income families, because paying their utility

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



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bill is a big percentage of any of their take-home pay.

We are already seeing early signs that tax reform will create an environment where wages will be higher and opportunity will be more abundant for years, even decades, to come.

President Trump and Republicans in Congress understand that when you make America a more attractive place to invest and create jobs, you are helping American families and communities.

We understand that the myth of an “us versus them” economy, where employers must lose for workers to win, is nothing more than a divisive political talking point with no basis in economics. That is why we seized this generational opportunity to provide a 21st century tax code that will give our country a fairer fight with our competitors overseas. We are already seeing new factories announced and new investments pouring into our country as a result.

Tax reform is far from the only way this President and this Congress have gone to bat for the future of our country. We have taken a machete to the forest of redtape that the Obama administration left behind.

To name just three examples, Congress and the White House have teamed up to roll back regulations that threatened hundreds of thousands of coal jobs, required States to give grants to Planned Parenthood, and had needlessly blocked oil exploration in a small portion of Federal land in Alaska.

After the Senate confirmed President Trump’s Cabinet, from Secretary Mattis at the Pentagon to Administrator Pruitt at the EPA, these fine officials have notched achievement after achievement for the American people, laying the groundwork for a stronger and safer nation.

We have made major progress for American veterans, like Cpl Matthew Bradford of Central Kentucky, a true American hero who will be attending tonight as a guest of the First Lady.

Congress has passed and the President has signed laws that will help our veterans access the healthcare options they need and the employment training programs they deserve. We have much more to do for our heroes, but these first steps are indeed promising.

We have taken big steps in the war against addiction and the scourge of opioids, an issue that is deeply personal for far, far too many American families.

In just his first year in office, the President has begun to transform the Federal judiciary. President Trump had more new circuit court judges confirmed in his first year than any prior President, a testimony to the fine quality of the nominees he sends here to the Senate, and we will vote to confirm another excellent judge later today. And the President rose to the occasion of a Supreme Court vacancy by filling it with a brilliant and experienced jurist in Justice Gorsuch.

On all of these fronts—from middle-class Americans’ pocketbooks to the ongoing fight against ISIL—there is more good news than I can begin to recite this morning.

I very much look forward to attending the State of the Union tonight and hearing from our President. On behalf of all the Americans we represent—men and women from coast to coast who are seeing the economy turn around and their country grow stronger before their eyes—I am glad there will be so much to applaud.

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 David Ryan Stras, of Minnesota, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit.

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

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

REMEMBERING ELDER VON G. KEETCH

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I rise to honor the life of my friend Elder Von G. Keetch, legal counsel and leader in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His passing on Friday evening was sudden and unexpected, and I wish to extend my condolences to his family during this difficult time.

Elder Keetch served as a general authority and executive director of the LDS Church’s Public Affairs Department. He helped to shape community and government relations for the church as a recognized expert in constitutional law. His career was devoted to defending religious liberty for all religious institutions. His insight was particularly salient during this ever-changing world. As his daughter Steffani Keetch Dastrup said, “He wanted to defend and support all churches and all religious beliefs and all people’s rights to believe and act

the way they feel is right. That was a big part of his work.”

I consider it a privilege to have worked alongside Elder Keetch over the past several years. I was able to witness firsthand the love he had for his wife, the pride he had in his children, and the devotion he had for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am grateful for his guidance, for his counsel, and for his friendship.

His humble expertise and kind demeanor will be sorely missed by all those who knew him. His legacy of faith and love will bless his family for generations to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

REMEMBERING ED LORENZEN

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I rise with great sadness to remember Edward Lorenzen, who, along with his 4-year-old son Michael, perished this weekend in a house fire.

Ed was invaluable to my staff during last year’s tax reform debate. The Washington Post honored his contributions to Congress, saying: “Quietly and intelligently, Mr. Lorenzen provided objective, reliable fiscal information, even—or especially—when facts and figures were the last thing wishful thinkers in Washington [or the government] wanted to face.”

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, where Ed served as a senior adviser, said: “He was a brilliant budget mind—his guidance and expertise is a void that cannot be filled.”

The committee also remembered his deep love for his children, saying: “We worked every day with a kind, loving man who cherished his three kids, bringing them to the office on occasion and lighting up in their presence and at the sound of their names.”

I cannot imagine the grief Ed and Michael’s family and loved ones face. I would like to extend my deepest sympathies to them during this difficult time. May we all hold our families a little closer today.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, tonight the President will address a joint session of Congress in his first official State of the Union. I want to talk about what I expect the President to say and also what I suspect he will not.

The President will be eager to defend the accomplishments of his nascent administration and take credit for a healthy American economy, pointing to low unemployment, job growth, and a soaring stock market, but the truth is, these trends were present before Donald Trump took office. President Trump was handed an already healthy economy by his predecessor. Like many things in his life, he inherited the healthy economy.

Here are two words we will not hear President Trump say tonight about the