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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.

Lord, through all generations You have been the source of our hope and strength. We are astounded by the majesty of Your sovereignty, for a thousand years for You are like a few hours. Today, inspire our lawmakers to think Your thoughts and follow Your precepts, seeking always to be receptive to Your guidance. May they strive to reach agreement on critical issues rather than simply to win debates. As they march to the drumbeat of Your leading, strengthen them with Your powerful presence. May they trust You to bring unity within their diversity.

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 (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The majority leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, this week, the Senate has taken important steps to fulfill our advise-and-consent responsibility on the President's nominees. We have ended unnecessary delays that kept well-qualified individuals from filling important posts at the Departments of Agriculture and Commerce and confirmed both of them.

TRIBUTE TO DEAN HELLER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, on an entirely different matter, I am sorry to say it is time to begin offering thanks and farewells to Members whose Senate service will conclude at the end of the 115th Congress.

Today, I would like to begin with our friend, the senior Senator from Nevada. It doesn't feel like much of an exaggeration to say that DEAN HELLER may have been destined for public service. I don't just mean his eagerness to serve or his outgoing personality. There were other signs. For example, one of the stops on his childhood paper route in Carson City was the Governor's mansion itself. Talk about early civic involvement.

At every step of the way, from successful businessman to his local and statewide races, all the way here to the Capitol, DEAN earned the respect of his neighbors and constituents by following the hard-working example set by his parents. His mother worked as a cook in a school cafeteria. His father was an auto mechanic who raced stock cars on the side. Their son grew up to be the only sitting Senator I would trust to replace my transmission.

When most politicians use phrases like "rolling up their sleeves" and "getting their hands dirty," they are usually referring to things like late-night negotiating or taking tough votes—in other words, more talking. Not DEAN HELLER, he means it literally. As DEAN likes to say, here in Washington, during the week, he works for the people of Nevada, but at home, on the weekends, there he works for his wife Lynne on the ranch they keep up together.

But let it not be said that even in the midst of hard labor, DEAN isn't capable of multitasking. After all, sometimes official duties just can't wait. I have it on good authority that on one occasion Dean had to field a surprise phone call from President Obama on his cell while standing right in the middle of a ditch.

Another time, he took a call from President Trump and talked business right there in the aisle of a home improvement store. Something about this image seems just right—not talking, not posturing, doing. That is DEAN HELLER; isn't it?

He didn't come to Washington to court praise for lofty rhetoric or to become a TV star. He came here to do. In just 7 years, DEAN has authored or helped to introduce 100 pieces of legislation that are now law.

Perhaps first and foremost, he has built a reputation as one of the Senate's chief advocates for our veterans. DEAN shares his home State with more than 200,000 men and women who have served our Nation, including one he calls "Dad."

Keeping the promise of top-notch VA services across Nevada's widespread rural communities is no small task. The facilities in Reno, in particular, weren't always up to the job, but day in and day out, DEAN has made it his mission to right the ship. As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, he has fought to expand access to care, contributing key provisions to the VA MISSION Act and spearheading the 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act. It is a legacy that is already making a difference for our veterans.

But these are hardly the only victories DEAN won for Nevada and for our Nation. He came to the Senate in 2011, representing a State that had been hit hard by the great recession and was trying hard to regain its footing. Nevada communities faced ballooning foreclosure rates and persistent unemployment. Fortunately, their new Senator was intent on hooking up the economic jumper cables and getting things humming once more.

DEAN has seized opportunities to champion an economic agenda that puts workers and job creators back in the driver's seat. He was a driving force behind the once-in-a-generation tax reform passed last December to put more

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



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money in the pockets of working families. It is pouring a new 21st century foundation for American businesses to compete, win, and create more jobs right here at home.

Today, Nevada is doing better, our Nation is flourishing, and DEAN HELLER was there every step of the way. He was especially instrumental in making sure that tax reform increased the child tax credit. DEAN knew that working parents need that money more than the IRS does.

Nevada veterans, Nevada workers, Nevada families—DEAN never lost sight of the reason he came here to Washington. He has been a happy warrior here in the trenches, with a ready grin and an iron determination to do right by his friends and his neighbors.

I also have it on good authority that seeing DEAN in action back home in his natural habitat is truly a sight to behold. His joy at every conversation and every handshake around Carson City are palpable. Nevadans are DEAN's people. They always have been, and he has always been theirs too.

According to some of the staff who travel around the State with him, it is practically impossible to make any brief stops anywhere. At a fast-food restaurant, or a sporting goods store, or even a gas station, DEAN would inevitably run into friends and set about swapping stories or Carson City inside jokes. On the rare occasions when DEAN didn't know the proprietor or fellow customers—no trouble, no trouble—he would have a room full of new friends in about 3 minutes flat.

I am told it never got old for the people around DEAN to witness the energy he drew from his friends, neighbors, and constituents. He was delighted to be one of them and honored to be their employee—"a man of the people"—not a cliché, in this case, a reality.

You don't need to take my word for it. I hear there is objective evidence out there, photographs from the Nevada Day Parade in Carson City. Suffice it to say it takes a certain kind of person to steal the show, riding horseback, dressed head to toe in full western regalia, something like John Wayne. It is no wonder his grandkids—Brielle, Zachary, and Ava—know him as "Duke."

Now, his boss, Lynne, might very well have put him up to it. I hear she rides right there alongside him. But DEAN is no newcomer to the parade. In fact, it is the very same parade he marched in as a Scout years ago.

If you read that story in a book, you would think it was almost too earnest and too all-American to be true, but that is DEAN HELLER. He is the paper boy who started out delivering the headlines and wound up making the headlines, the Senator who still saddles up for the same parade from his childhood memories, one of Nevada's favorite sons and a dedicated servant of the entire Silver State.

DEAN's colleagues are really sorry to see him go. For a leader with this

much heart and this much talent, any departure would feel premature. This one certainly does, but I doubt DEAN will have trouble finding good uses for a little more spare time. I know he and Lynne must be looking forward to saddling up their horses and setting out for the Sierras a little more often than they have been able to lately, and I hear he could use a little bit of rehearsal time before he leads the Heller family band through its repertoire of Christmas carols this year—lead trombone. Lead trombone is no laughing matter. Maybe he will even find time to get back in the driver's seat for a race or two.

So whatever it is that DEAN does next—whatever it is—he should take with him great pride in all he has accomplished here in a policy legacy that will continue lifting up our Nation's veterans, workers, and middle-class families literally for years and years to come, and the sincere best wishes of the friends he has made here in this Chamber for health, happiness, and every future success for himself, for Lynne, and for their entire lovely family.

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. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF THOMAS FARR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, later this afternoon, the Senate is scheduled to vote on the confirmation of Mr. Thomas Farr for the Eastern District of North Carolina. I have made my opposition to this nominee clear on a daily basis, but allow me to remind my colleagues, to recap, before this vote just what we are dealing with here. We are being asked to confirm the go-to guy in North Carolina if you need a lawyer to defend voter suppression. Some might think that is hyperbolic, but I sincerely ask my colleagues not to go for hyperbole but to look at the evidence.

Mr. Farr was the lead lawyer in defending North Carolina's discriminatory congressional maps drawn by the State's Republicans, which were struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional. This is a very conservative Supreme Court, which has been mostly unsympathetic to arguments of disenfranchisement—as evidenced by the Shelby County case—but in this instance, they could not help but overturn the map for racial discrimination, despite the evidence provided by Mr. Farr.

Mr. Farr was also the lead lawyer in defense of North Carolina's insidious voter ID law, which the Supreme Court ruled "targeted African Americans with almost surgical precision"—targeted African Americans with almost surgical precision.

North Carolina's Republicans designed the law after asking for and receiving data sorted by race on voting practices. Mr. Farr not only defended the law, he described the voting restrictions, which forbade the use of government employee IDs, student IDs, and IDs used for public assistance, as "a minor inconvenience."

That is only Mr. Farr's recent history involving voting suppression. If we go back and look at the campaign of Senator Jesse Helms in 1990, Mr. Farr represented the Helms campaign and defended it against accusations that it sent over 120,000 postcards, almost exclusively to Black voters, that falsely warned them they could be charged with a crime if they tried to vote—falsely—falsely warned them. The mailers were sent after statistics emerged that African-American registration was outpacing White voter registration.

The sordid history of Mr. Farr's efforts to suppress voting goes back even further. Mr. Farr was a member of Senator Jesse Helms' 1984 campaign. In that campaign, he wasn't merely a hired gun; he was a close legal associate of Senator Helms, a man David Broder of the Washington Post called "the last prominent unabashed White racist politician in this country."

In that 1984 campaign, according to memoranda by the Voting Rights section of the Department of Justice, Mr. Farr was involved in the so-called "ballot security" program run by the Helms campaign and the North Carolina Republican Party. The so-called ballot security program included sending postcards to minority voters in an effort to suppress voting.

In 2006, Mr. Farr's association with these noxious voter suppression attempts by Helms' campaign was enough to deny him confirmation to this very seat. In the intervening years, he has not repented or even moved on to different issues. He is still defending attempts to disenfranchise African-American voters.

I am not from North Carolina, but if I were, I would be embarrassed to have this man nominated and placed on the Federal bench. It takes but an ounce of principle to say: No, I am not defending discrimination and voter suppression. Yet, time and time and time again, not just 1984, not just 1990 but 2013 and 2015, Mr. Thomas Farr has stepped up to the plate to represent and defend voter suppression in a court of law, and we are being asked to reward him—reward him for these activities—with a lifetime appointment as a Federal judge in a district that is 27 percent African American, where he will have the power to make decisions on voting rights and civil rights for a generation.