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## Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable PATRICK J. TOOMEY, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

### PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, our lamp and light, we praise Your Holy Name.

Lord, You are our strength and shield, enabling us to be sure-footed even when standing on mountain heights. Stay with our lawmakers. Support them with Your mighty hand and keep their feet from slipping. Enable our Senators to one day stand before Your presence with great joy. Show them Your greatness until the things of Earth grow strangely dim in the light of Your glory and grace.

We pray in Your majestic 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, February 8, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable PATRICK J. TOOMEY, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,  
President pro tempore.

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

### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

### BUDGET AGREEMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this Congress and this President have delivered a historic series of achievements for the American people. We took an ax to the redtape holding back our economy. We used the Congressional Review Act a record 15 times to pave the way for job creation. After years of broken promises to our veterans, we delivered VA reform legislation to begin giving our heroes the more accessible care, greater choice, and workforce training they deserve. We confirmed outstanding judges to the Federal bench. We advanced efforts to address the opioid crisis. And, of course, we passed the most significant tax overhaul in a generation.

Already, tax reform is increasing take-home pay for American workers. Already, businesses are investing more, expanding more, and creating more good-paying jobs right here at home. Over the past year, we have built a record of successes for middle-class families and a stronger, safer country.

But among all the work that still remains, one critical piece of unfinished business is now really close to the finish line. If we act now, we can start rebuilding our military and provide our troops the training and equipment they need to defend the homeland and protect the American people.

The crisis in our military is acute. Just this week, headlines revealed that two-thirds of the Navy's F/A-18 aircraft are not prepared to fly. The fleet, which must secure sea lines of communication across the globe and patrol

the Persian Gulf and the South China Sea, has shrunk to the smallest ship count in nearly three decades.

We have become too reliant on Special Operations forces and have radically drawn down our conventional force structure.

This has not been lost on China or Russia. They are improving their conventional forces and intimidating their neighbors. Our force faces a complex collection of threats and challenges from Iran, China, Russia, and North Korea to ISIL, al-Qaida, and their affiliates.

The need for our forward presence has not diminished in the Persian Gulf or in the South China Sea and the wider Pacific, neither has our responsibility to our NATO allies in Europe or to the Republic of Korea. No, we have not asked our all-volunteer military to do any less for our country. They have just been forced to make do with less.

And all of these short-term funding bills have handicapped our military leaders' ability to make long-term plans and investments. In December, the Navy Secretary said the inefficiencies from continuing resolutions have cost his Department enough money to pay for an entire squadron of fighter planes or two destroyers.

Let me say that again. The Secretary of the Navy said that the inefficiencies from continuing resolutions have cost his Department enough money to pay for an entire squadron of fighter planes or two destroyers.

Here is how General Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, put it. He said: "The U.S. military's competitive advantage against potential adversaries is eroding."

Yesterday, I announced a bipartisan budget agreement that will finally bring this to a close. The agreement will allow for the funding levels recommended by the NDAA conference report—authorization levels secured by the stalwart leadership of Chairman JOHN MCCAIN and our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee.

• 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 what does this mean for our men and women in uniform? It means putting a stop to the decline in combat readiness. It means knowing that our weapons systems will be delivered, maintained, and kept on the cutting edge.

Take it from Secretary Mattis. Yesterday, he explained just what this agreement will do. Here is how he put it: It will “ensure our military can defend our way of life, preserve the promise of prosperity, and pass on the freedoms you and I enjoy to the next generation.”

Our volunteer servicemembers aren't the only Americans this agreement will help. It also builds on the progress we have made for veterans and military families by providing for better care and helping to cut the VA's maintenance backlog.

It offers reinforcements to families on the front lines of our Nation's struggle with opioid addiction and substance abuse. According to the CDC, opioid overdose deaths increased fivefold just between 1999 and 2016. On average, this epidemic takes more than 100 American lives every single day. This agreement provides for new grants, prevention programs, and law enforcement initiatives to bolster existing national and State efforts.

The legislation secures relief for families who are still struggling to rebuild in the wake of last year's spate of natural disasters. This provision was only made possible by tireless work from several of my colleagues. Thanks to the leadership of Senator CORNYN, to Senator CRUZ's advocacy for Texas, and to Senator RUBIO, who led on behalf of Florida and spoke up forcefully for the people of Puerto Rico, help will soon be on the way.

The agreement also provides for new investment in our Nation's infrastructure, a shared bipartisan priority.

Now, I am confident that no Senator on either side of the aisle believes this is a perfect bill, but I am also confident that this is our best chance to begin rebuilding our military and to make progress on issues directly affecting the American people.

This is a bill for brave Americans serving our country, including the many servicemembers based in my home State of Kentucky. They deserve the pay raise we promised them and the confidence that when they leave our shores, they are combat-ready.

This is a bill for our distinguished military commanders, who have sounded the alarm on sequestration more times than any of us can count.

This is a bill for our heroes who have come home. They should be greeted by a better funded, streamlined Veterans' Administration that is equipped to meet their needs.

This is a bill for American families who have been victimized by brutal storms or the scourge of drug addiction. They deserve the assistance this agreement secures.

I hope each Senator will carefully review this bipartisan bill and support it.

We need to build on our historic year, seize the opportunity, and keep moving forward.

#### 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.

#### CHILD PROTECTION IMPROVEMENTS ACT OF 2017

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany H.R. 695, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany H.R. 695, a bill to amend the National Child Protection Act of 1993 to establish a national criminal history background check system and criminal history review program for certain individuals who, related to their employment, have access to children, the elderly, or individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill.

McConnell motion to refer the message of the House on the bill to the Committee on Appropriations, with instructions, McConnell amendment No. 1922, to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 1923 (to (the instructions) amendment No. 1922), of a perfecting nature.

McConnell amendment No. 1924 (to amendment No. 1923), of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 11:30 a.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

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.

Mr. SCHUMER. 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.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

#### BUDGET AGREEMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday, after months of painstaking negotiations, the Republican leader and I reached a 2-year budget deal. Not only will it end the series of fiscal crises that have gridlocked this body, it will also deliver large investments in our military and robust funding of middle-class programs. It will also give a sig-

nificant boost to our Nation's healthcare and provide long-overdue relief to disaster-stricken parts of our country.

As I said yesterday, it doesn't include everything that Democrats want nor everything that Republicans want, but it is a good deal for the American people, and it is a strong signal that we can break the gridlock that has overwhelmed this body and work together for the good of the country.

Let me run through a few of the benefits this agreement will provide.

Our military has suffered from the uncertainty of endless short-term spending bills. This budget deal puts that to an end. It gives the military a significant boost in support and allows the Pentagon to make long-term decisions about its budget. It is the right thing to do.

I want to credit two people—first, my dear friend Senator MCCAIN. He talked to me repeatedly, even when he was ill, about the need for funding defense. He also talked about the need for doing immigration and tried to make them go hand in hand. Senator MCCAIN has been our leader in this Chamber on both sides of the aisle in terms of making sure defense is funded, and I know that today he is proud of what we are doing for the military.

I would also like to thank Secretary Mattis. He visited me repeatedly. He is a Cabinet Secretary who seems to be doing his job, rather than focusing on an ideological path that divides people. He worked hard for this and deserves a great deal of credit.

We Democrats have always argued that we want to fund our military and our middle-class programs. We need good help on both. A mother whose child has died from opioid addiction, a veteran who is waiting in line to get help, college students with great debt on their shoulders, pensioners whose pensions might be greatly diminished need help too. To say that our military needs help to the exclusion of all of these other worthy causes is not fair to them and not good for America. I have always argued that we can do both, and this budget shows we can. We can do both—fund the military and help fund the middle class. For those naysayers who said it could not be done, it sure can with this budget. I am proud of what it does for the middle class.

For a decade—we all know this; we all talk about it—our middle class has suffered from a needless and self-imposed austerity in Congress that has limited investments in jobs and education, infrastructure, scientific research, and more. This deal puts that to an end as well. For those who say we cannot do both, we can. I am proud of this budget, because it does. Let me go into a few specifics.

There are billions of dollars of support for childcare, for helping middle-class families shoulder the very heavy burden of childcare. They need to take care of their kids in a way that they can have confidence when both parents