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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable THOM TILLIS, a Senator from the State of North Carolina.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, the fountain of wisdom, thank You for this season of penance and personal reflection. Lord, as we remember that the last time Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day fell on the same day—it was 1945—we thank You for the many challenging seasons through which You have brought this Nation and world. As we continue to depend upon the power of Your prevailing providence, deliver us from majoring in minors. Bless our lawmakers. As they commit themselves to You, make them a voice for the voiceless and a help for the helpless. May they make it their first priority to fulfill Your purposes for their lives.

We pray in Your sacred 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 14, 2018.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable THOM TILLIS, a Senator from the State of North Carolina, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

IMMIGRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is now Wednesday morning of the week the Senate set aside to debate DACA, border security, interior enforcement, and other immigration issues. I promised I would clear the way to debate these matters this week, and I have. I promised I would ensure a fair amendment process in which both sides could offer legislation for discussion and votes, and I have. Just yesterday, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus released a letter thanking me for keeping my commitment and urged the Senate to resolve this issue quickly.

But we haven't even been able to get started yet. We haven't even been able to get started. Yesterday, I tried twice to open the debate and start the voting. Both times, my Democratic colleagues objected. I am a little perplexed, frankly, by the holdup.

My Democratic colleagues have spent months—months, as we all know—demanding that the Senate take up this issue. They even shut down the government—shut down the government unnecessarily, I might add—in order to secure this very week for this discus-

sion. But now that the time has come to make law instead of just making points, they are stalling. Why? Why, after months and months spent demanding that the Senate take up this issue, do they now object to even starting the debate? Because they know, no matter how long they spend in closed-door negotiations, they can't change the fact that the President has spelled out a fair and generous framework that will be necessary to earn his signature. These guys can't take yes for an answer. So instead of moving to fulfill our promises and address the DACA issue, they haven't even allowed the debate to begin.

There is a widespread desire in this Chamber to find a resolution for the illegal immigrants who were brought to this country as children—widespread agreement on that—but common sense dictates that we cannot simply treat one symptom of our broken immigration policy in complete isolation. We must address the underlying problems as well. That means fixing broken parts of our legal immigration system.

We must also ensure the safety of the American people. That is why a DACA resolution should be paired with new security measures at our borders and commonsense steps to improve security inside our borders, steps like fixing the loophole that forces us to release thousands of criminal aliens whose home countries won't take them back, steps like enacting Kate's Law to put criminal offenders who repeatedly and illegally cross our borders behind bars, cracking down with stiffer penalties for human trafficking, and updating the removability grounds for drug traffickers, repeat drunk drivers, gang members, sex offenders, and other violent and dangerous criminals. Why in the world those ideas be controversial?

Keeping Americans safe does not need to be a partisan issue, and addressing these important safety issues along with DACA, border security, and

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



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other parts of our broken immigration system is our best chance to produce legislation that can pass the House, pass the Senate, and earn the President's signature. This is why the proposal put forward by Senator GRASSLEY and others, which draws on the President's generous framework and which the President has officially endorsed, has my support, because presumably we will actually make a law here.

I have made no effort—none—to tell Democrats what amendments they should offer. Of course, they shouldn't try to dictate Republican amendments either.

The longer my colleagues across the aisle refuse to come to the table, the longer they are unable to produce any legislation they actually support, the lower the odds that we can arrive at a legislative solution this week.

Yesterday alone, the Senate was open for 9 hours—yesterday alone, 9 hours. Nine hours we could have spent processing amendments and proceeding to votes. Nine hours down the drain because Democrats won't let us start the debate they have spent months demanding.

Now that we can finally proceed to consider the underlying bill this morning, I hope my colleagues across the aisle will come to the table. The President has made clear what principles must be addressed if we are going to make a law instead of merely making political points.

While our Democratic colleagues can no longer prevent the Senate from starting the debate, they can continue to delay votes on amendments. I hope that won't happen.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on Monday, President Trump unveiled his proposal to improve America's infrastructure. Today he will host committee chairmen and ranking members at the White House for a bipartisan, bicameral meeting on that subject. I am grateful the President is prioritizing this and reaching across the aisle.

Experts agree that America's aging infrastructure needs a lot of help. Nationwide, 9.1 percent of our bridges are considered structurally deficient, and 13.6 percent are considered functionally obsolete. One recent study suggests that road congestion costs us \$160 billion a year—for road congestion. The answer is not simply to throw new money at old problems.

It took American workers less time to build great skyscrapers, start to finish, than it now takes bureaucrats to review—not even build, but review—proposals for new bridges and roadways. We need to streamline regulations, reform the permitting process, and get government out of the way wherever possible. Once projects are proposed, they should be reviewed in a safe but reasonable amount of time and then completed as quickly and cost effectively as possible.

This is a prime opportunity for bipartisan cooperation. Our last three highway bills, our last three WRDA bills, and our last three FAA bills all passed the Senate easily, averaging more than 80 votes. I hope we can renew that consensus when the time comes.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, for 8 years under President Obama, our economy didn't perform as well as it should have. America's wages and salaries hardly grew. Many job creators sat on the sidelines, wary of new tax increases or heavy-handed regulations. Washington had its foot on the brake. Last year, all that changed.

President Trump and this Republican Congress set out to make life easier for workers and for job creators. We cut regulations and passed tax reform to give middle-class families immediate relief and set the stage for more hiring and more wage growth in the years ahead.

I recently heard from a small family-owned inland river shipyard in Ashland, KY, along the Ohio River. They build and repair commercial barges. Here is what their president wrote. He said: "Thanks to the tax change and optimism of our customers, we are at long last able to replace equipment which has been used way past [its] life expectancy and possibly add two more production workers."

Last week a Louisville employer dropped by to tell me how he is using his tax reform savings: \$1,000 bonuses for more than 100 Kentucky employees.

Small companies and big business alike are thrilled that they finally have a 21st-century tax code. It makes them more competitive with overseas rivals and frees up more money to invest right here at home, and middle-class workers are reaping the rewards. Major national companies like Pfizer and Home Depot, which together employ more than half a million Americans, have announced hundreds of millions of dollars in employee bonuses—again, thanks to tax reform.

Just this week, MetLife announced a major new investment in 50,000-plus employees. The company is raising its minimum wage, enhancing benefits, boosting retirement contributions, and creating a skills development fund. In short, MetLife is betting big on U.S. workers, and so are the more than 300 other companies that have already announced major investments in their employees and in their facilities—right here in America, right here, thanks to historic tax reform.

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. MCCONNELL. 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.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

BROADER OPTIONS FOR AMERICANS ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 2579, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 302, H.R. 2579, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the premium tax credit with respect to unsubsidized COBRA continuation coverage.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. All postcloture time is expired.

The question is on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

The motion was agreed to.

BROADER OPTIONS FOR AMERICANS ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2579) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the premium tax credit with respect to unsubsidized COBRA continuation coverage.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

AMENDMENT NO. 1959

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.)

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 1959.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Iowa [Mr. GRASSLEY] proposes an amendment numbered 1959.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

AMENDMENT NO. 1948 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1959

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I call up the Toomey amendment No. 1948 to the Grassley amendment No. 1959.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL], for Mr. TOOMEY, proposes an amendment numbered 1948 to amendment No. 1959.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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