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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, Spirit of light and truth, beauty and freedom, thank You for Your sustaining grace.

Continue to strengthen our lawmakers that they may play their part in the life of our times. Lord, give them wisdom to think clearly, speak kindly, and act bravely. Make them patient and thoughtful with one another as they seek to serve You and country with integrity. May they remember that without You, they will fail to do their best or reach their highest. Keep them from stumbling or slipping.

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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). 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 pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Andrew Wheeler, of Virginia, to be Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 1 minute as in morning business.

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

PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, when it comes to considering Presidential nominees, I have said in the past that I don't believe in playing by two sets of rules.

If the Democrats insist on rejecting President Trump's Cabinet nominees or insist on rejecting qualified judges based on an ideological litmus test, they can't expect kid-glove treatment for the next Democratic President.

However, I urge Senators to end this arms race now. We can start the disarmament by agreeing to the Blunt-Lankford proposal based on the bipartisan agreement that was worked out with then-Majority Leader Reid in the 113th Congress.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NORTH KOREA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I would like to begin with a few words on President Trump's Hanoi summit with North Korea. The President should be commended for his personal commitment to persuading Kim Jong Un to pursue a different path.

By January 2017, it was clear the prior administration's policy of strategic patience had not worked. In retrospect, it was not very strategic to sit patiently while North Korea dramatically expanded its nuclear and missile

capabilities. The Trump administration, in taking a different path, moved quickly to adopt the policy of maximum pressure, rallying international partners to respond firmly to North Korea's provocations. The President also demonstrated a willingness to engage the North Korean leader directly, breathing new life into our diplomacy to solve this seemingly intractable problem.

The President has gone the extra mile to demonstrate his sincerity in wanting to resolve this issue. It was smart to bring Kim Jong Un to Singapore and to Vietnam to expose the North Korean delegation to the kind of economic prosperity that could be possible if he were to choose a new path.

High-level diplomacy can carry high-level risk, but the President should be commended for walking away when it became clear insufficient progress had been made on denuclearization. Kim Jong Un now has a long train ride home, and he will have time to reflect on the future that is still within North Korea's grasp, but the President has demonstrated that such a future must be accompanied by real denuclearization.

Every country has a stake in North Korea's denuclearization. I hope China and other countries with influence over Kim Jong Un will do their part to urge him to return to the negotiating table and seize the opportunity to bring prosperity to the people of North Korea and peace and stability to the Korean Peninsula and to the region.

NOMINATIONS

Madam President, on another matter, this week, the Senate has made progress in confirming President Trump's nominees. On Tuesday, Eric Miller became the 31st circuit court judge to be confirmed under this administration. Yesterday, we confirmed Michael Desmond to serve as Chief Counsel at the IRS.

Of course, this progress is only remarkable given the Senate Democrats'

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



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historic level of obstruction. As I noted yesterday, for example, Mr. Desmond's nomination earned near-unanimous approval from the Finance Committee in August of last year but only this week received a vote on the Senate floor. So many important roles are still vacant with well-qualified nominees who are ready and willing to fill them.

Later today, we will vote on Andrew Wheeler to serve as Administrator of the EPA. Mr. Wheeler has spent the last year as Deputy and now as Acting Administrator. He has wasted no time in proving he has what it takes to lead the Agency. In drawing on a wealth of experience that includes service as staff director of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and a tenure at the EPA that first began back in 1991, Mr. Wheeler has proven his ability to advance pragmatic solutions to pressing environmental challenges. I hope each of my colleagues will join me in supporting yet another well-qualified nominee and vote to confirm him.

Later today, we will also have an opportunity to take care of one other long-overdue item—the nomination of John Ryder to the Board of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Even after being reported out of committee twice on a voice vote, this well-qualified, uncontroversial nominee was nearly subjected to a needless cloture vote this week. I am glad that, instead, we will be voting to confirm Ryder and sending him on to work on behalf of the Tennessee Valley communities.

THE GREEN NEW DEAL

Madam President, on another matter, I have been spotlighting all week our Democratic colleagues' hard left turn toward socialism—their fixation on gaining more government control over more of our lives. With the Democratic Politician Protection Act, Washington Democrats want to control more of what Americans can say about them and how they get elected.

With the so-called Green New Deal, Washington Democrats want our government to spend more money than the entire gross domestic product of the entire world on new spending programs to forcibly remodel Americans' homes, take away our cars, dramatically increase energy costs, and disarm our economy while China roars straight ahead. You might think that right there is plenty of leftwing social engineering. You might think it is enough—oh, but they aren't stopping there, the Democrats. They are going after Americans' healthcare and their private health insurance plans.

Earlier this week, House Democrats introduced a bill that would take away every private insurance option that American families rely on and force everyone into a single, government-run system. Employer-sponsored coverage wouldn't just be discouraged, it would be illegal. They call this legislation Medicare for All. It is really more like "Medicare for None." It completely explodes the Medicare system as it cur-

rently exists. The program our seniors have paid into for decades and now rely on, the Democrats want gone—wiped out.

Remember, by the time Americans turn 65, most have paid tens and tens of thousands of dollars into the current system through Medicare taxes. According to one estimate, Americans with average earnings who reached the retirement age back in 2015 will have paid a present value of more than \$70,000 into Medicare over the years.

American seniors have counted on Medicare. They have planned around it, and they have paid into it with every paycheck. Yet now House Democrats have decided it is time to change the rules on them in the middle of the game. They want to tear down Medicare until the only thing left is the name and slap that name on a completely different system that a few House Democrats invented and that the Democratic Socialists of America is proud to endorse. The Democratic Socialists of America is proud to endorse that. Then the Democrats propose to take that new government system and pile every single American into it as a one-size-fits-all—long waits for treatment, higher costs, and an end to Medicare as we know it—no choice, no options, and no alternatives allowed.

More than 170 million Americans currently get health insurance through their employers. Surveys show that a majority is actually pretty happy with its own specific plans. Well, too bad. The Democrats want those families thrown off those plans. Within 2 years, their proposal would make private health insurance, as Americans know it, illegal across the board. It would be unlawful for employers to offer health benefits to their employees and their families. It is right there in the bill. It would be against the law for employers to offer healthcare to their employees.

Here is what it reads: "It shall be unlawful for a private health insurer to sell health insurance coverage . . . [or] an employer to provide benefits . . . that duplicate the benefits provided under this Act by the government."

How about that? We all remember ObamaCare's famous broken promise: If you like your healthcare plan, you can keep it. If you like the doctor you have, you can keep your doctor too. That was the pledge before the Democrats' policy was actually implemented. Not long after, the fact checkers named that promise their "lie of the year."

Well, this time around, my Democratic friends are not even bothering to pretend that families' lives would not be disrupted. A reporter asked one of our Senate colleagues who is running for President, "So for people out there who like their insurance, they don't get to keep it?" Her response? Listen to this. "Let's eliminate all of that." This is one of our colleagues running for President.

All the plans American families like and rely on made illegal—illegal—by

this bill, not just unaffordable, not just inconvenient, illegal, and all to clear space for a new government takeover.

So how much is this massive takeover going to cost? Well, under even conservative estimates, this proposal would cost more than \$32 trillion over the first 10 years—\$32 trillion over the first 10 years, more than the Federal Government spent on everything over the last 8 years combined.

Where is that money going to come from? Well, I think we all know the answer to that: massive tax hikes on the American people, cuts to services, rationing of healthcare, broken promises, and debt. That is where it is going to come from.

Here is what one economist found in the numbers.

The Federal Reserve's data only go back to 1929, but it's unlikely that the government ever collected more than 20 percent of GDP in taxes. To fully fund Medicare-for-all, that figure would have to rise to more than 30 percent of GDP.

Now, look, I am sure we will hear the class warfare rhetoric about soaking the rich and making a small group of Americans pay for all of this, but it will not be true. We all know it will not be true. The bill for this \$32 trillion takeover would land squarely—squarely—on middle-class families. There is no way around it.

Even if the IRS confiscated every dollar of Americans' adjusted gross incomes over \$1 million—took it all—if the IRS took every cent over \$1 million, it wouldn't even pay for half of the proposal—wouldn't even pay for half of it.

Now, look, class warfare may be a favorite tactic across the aisle, but numbers are stubborn things. Math is math. The costs would have to fall on the middle class. Actually, they would fall on everyone, one way or another.

That economist put it this way, he said: "The simple fact is that financing Medicare-for-all would require a dramatic shift in the Federal tax structure and a substantial tax increase for almost all Americans." Almost all Americans.

So let's sum it up. Washington Democrats want the American people to fork over a recordbreaking percentage of our gross domestic product in taxes for the privilege of having their healthcare plans ripped away from them, even if they are happy with what they have, and the middle class is going to pay for it. What a great deal.

All this, and I haven't even begun to explain how this takeover would cut Americans' access to care and degrade the quality of care. We have all heard horror stories from abroad about bureaucrats making decisions instead of citizens and long waits for treatment.

Last year in Canada, the median wait time for medically necessary treatment from a specialist was 21 weeks—21 weeks. That is the average wait time for medically necessary treatment in Canada—more than double what it was up there just 25 years ago.