

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

## EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Resumed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Cheryl Marie Stanton, of South Carolina, to be Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division, Department of Labor.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

## NOMINATION OF JOHN P. ABIZAID

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of General Abizaid's confirmation to be our Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It took this administration nearly 2 years to even nominate someone to this critical position, and, unfortunately, we have seen the results of the absence of serious, experienced U.S. leadership.

I was pleased that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee expeditiously moved his nomination. In the past 2 years, we have seen Saudi leadership take actions that have seriously strained the U.S.-Saudi relationship and that have run fundamentally counter to basic international norms.

Saudi Arabia has detained and reportedly tortured members of its own royal family and has effectively abducted the Lebanese Prime Minister. In Yemen, the Crown Prince's coalition has led an offensive that has been responsible not just for breeding the world's worst humanitarian crisis but also for potentially opening the door to more malign Iranian influence. To this day, we still also seek accountability for the brutal murder of American resident and journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

With the White House's having conducted freelance diplomacy, the American people have had little faith that there has been serious pressure on the Saudi leadership for it to correct course. Worse, we continue to learn that the administration appears to be rewarding the Kingdom with secret side deals in support of its nuclear program—far outside the scope of legally prescribed processes.

Amidst all of this, we must find a way to get the U.S.-Saudi relationship back on course, for we do continue to share some common challenges and interests. Yet U.S. alliances are strongest with partners with whom we share values and with whom we can have honest conversations.

times—three times through committee for this graduate of Williams College and the University of Chicago Law School and two times sent back to the President for the former executive director of the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce. Well, hopefully the third time will be the charm, and we can finally do the prudent thing on the Senate floor. I hope each of my colleagues will join me in support of the Stanton nomination later this week.

Later this week, as I noted yesterday, we will finish with the nomination of David Bernhardt to join President Trump's Cabinet as Secretary of the Interior. Speaking of procedures coming in threes, this would be the third time Mr. Bernhardt will have been confirmed by the Senate. He served previously as the Department's Solicitor and as its Deputy Secretary. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, his "proven leadership" in these roles "has helped restore the multiple use of America's public lands."

They are not alone. Over his tenure, Mr. Bernhardt developed a reputation among sportsmen, conservation groups, and western Native American Tribes as a strong leader and partner in their efforts. So once again, I hope each of my colleagues will join me in voting to confirm David Bernhardt later this week.

## MEDICARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on a completely different matter, for some time now, my colleagues and I have been speaking out about the Democrats' parade of fantastical new proposals—plans to spend unprecedented sums of Americans' money in order to seize unprecedented control over Americans' lives.

Just a few weeks ago, the Senate voted on the so-called Green New Deal. It was Washington Democrats' plan to power down the U.S. economy and have the Federal Government intrude on basically every economic transaction and personal life choice in radically unprecedented ways. The specifics of the proposal, limited as they were, painted enough of a picture for outside experts to roughly estimate the price tag at as much as \$93 trillion, which is more money than the Federal Government has spent in its entire history, in exchange for the systematic dismantling of American prosperity.

It advocated for the abolition of the most affordable and plentiful domestic energy resources available to American families and a hog-tied American economy that our competitors would leave in the dust.

So it should come as no surprise that for the sequel we see and hear that Senate Democrats may soon officially introduce their proposed Washington, DC, takeover of health insurance—the plan I call "Medicare for None."

It is a fitting name for a proposal that would gut the Medicare Program

as American seniors know it, reuse the label on a new, government-run, one-size-fits-all arrangement, and remove 180 million Americans from the private insurance they have chosen in order to funnel them into a system without choice.

What is especially ironic is that my Democratic colleagues are choosing to agitate for this pivot toward socialism during this particularly important economic period—at this particular moment, with more job openings than Americans looking for work for the first time since recordkeeping started, when we have seen unemployment reach a 49-year low and wages growing faster than they have in a decade. It is the kind of economy where a single mom in Mississippi says: "It's amazing that I'm getting paid almost \$20 an hour to learn how to weld."

It is the kind of economy where garage door installers in Nevada say they are literally afraid to let potential new hires walk out the door because American workers are in such high demand.

Let's remember that this transformation is being helped along by Senate Republican ideas and policies that are the polar opposite—totally opposite—of what our Democratic friends are now calling for.

Here is how Republican pro-growth and pro-opportunity policies helped us get where we are: by encouraging job creators to invest here at home instead of penalizing success; by recognizing that working families know best how to spend their paychecks, not Washington; and by creating conditions for an economic surge that touches every corner of our country.

Now all of America is reaping the benefits. This isn't like the last administration, where 75 percent of new jobs and 90 percent of the population growth flowed into the very largest metropolitan areas. This time it is an all-American comeback, and all kinds of communities are benefiting from more jobs, more opportunities, and more growth in pay.

Monday is tax day. It is not exactly a time many of us look forward to, but this year marks the first time Americans are filing under the new Republican tax reform law that has helped them keep more of their paychecks and has helped to create the outstanding economy we see today. Democrats may be working overtime to bring this bright chapter to an end, but over here, on this side of the aisle, we will keep making sure that this is still just the beginning of these brighter days for the American people.

## 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.

General Abizaid faces a tall challenge, but I believe he is up to the job. He has the experience and leadership necessary to both manage a large mission and get the currently fraught relationship with Saudi Arabia back on track in a way that advances our security interests and stays true to our ideals.

I urge my colleagues to support General Abizaid's confirmation. His leadership, deep regional expertise, management skills, knowledge of Arabic, and experience in having served in conflict areas will make him an effective U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

#### CONFIRMATION OF PATRICK R. WYRICK

Mr. President, I want to spend a moment on the issue of judicial nominees—specifically the President's nominee for the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, Mr. Patrick Wyrick.

Mr. Wyrick's record suggests he is little more than a rightwing crusader in the war against the reproductive rights of women. In 2014, he spearheaded an amicus in the *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, case, arguing that corporations' religious rights were violated by the Affordable Care Act's requirement that employers' health plans cover birth control. By a 5-to-4 margin, the Supreme Court agreed. Likewise, while representing Oklahoma in *Pruitt v. Nova Health Systems*, Mr. Wyrick defended a law mandating that women who seek abortions first submit to having ultrasounds. Fortunately, the Oklahoma Supreme Court struck down that law.

I could go on, but the bottom line is that Mr. Wyrick embodies President Trump's pledge to only nominate judges who are committed to rolling back reproductive rights even if they are seriously unqualified for lifetime appointments.

Let's be honest about why the Republicans seek to confirm these judicial nominations at record speed. After being punished at the polls for their assault on affordable healthcare, they want our courts to do their dirty work for them. How convenient it is that the Republicans can confirm judges who have hostile records on healthcare even as they distance themselves from the Trump administration's reckless decision to declare the entire Affordable Care Act as unconstitutional, including the law's protections for patients with preexisting conditions, the tax credits that help families to afford premiums, the expansion of Medicaid, and so much more.

I am tired of watching the majority stack our courts in favor of wealthy special interests even as they know full well that Americans overwhelmingly oppose their morally bankrupt agenda. Once again, Americans oppose letting health insurance companies discriminate against people with preexisting conditions. They oppose their plan to end Medicaid as we know it and their trillion-dollar tax cuts for big corpora-

tions. They oppose this President's assault on the rights of consumers, workers, students, and women.

Democracy is supposed to be a battle of ideas, but when it comes to healthcare or student loan debt or climate change, the Republican Party does not have any. When you can't win on the merits, what do you do? You tip the scales of justice in your favor. Well, I, for one, will not stay silent. I will continue to speak out against unqualified nominees like Patrick Wyrick, and I will continue to vote against judges whose views are grossly out of step with the views of the vast majority of Americans on everything from the environment to women's reproductive rights to healthcare for all.

I yield the floor.

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. THUNE. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### TAX REFORM

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, tax day is not anyone's favorite day, but thanks to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, millions of American families are facing a less painful tax bill this year. They are also seeing a lot of economic opportunity.

When Republicans took office after President Trump's election, we were determined to make things better for American families. Under the Obama administration, the economy had stagnated, wages barely grew, job growth was weak, business investment growth was low.

Republicans knew that if we wanted to make life better for families, we had to turn that around. American families can't thrive if the economy isn't thriving. You need a strong, growing economy to give Americans access to good wages, good jobs, and real opportunities.

So we got right to work. We repealed burdensome regulations that were acting as a drag on economic growth, and we passed a comprehensive reform of our Nation's outdated Tax Code.

Why the Tax Code? Well, the Tax Code has a huge effect on our economy. A small business owner facing a huge tax bill is unlikely to be able to expand her business or to hire a new employee. In fact, if her tax burden is heavy enough, she may not even be able to keep her business open.

Similarly, a large business is going to find it pretty hard to create jobs or improve benefits for employees if it is struggling to stay competitive against foreign businesses that are paying much less in taxes.

Prior to the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, our Tax Code was not helping our economy. In fact, it was doing the opposite, and so we made reforming our Tax Code a priority.

Our goal with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was twofold: put more money in

Americans' pockets immediately and get the economy going again to give Americans access to good jobs, good wages, and opportunities for the long term, and that is exactly what we did. To put more money in Americans' pockets right away, we cut tax rates for American families, doubled the child tax credit, and nearly doubled the standard deduction, and now families are seeing the effects.

The liberal Tax Policy Center reports that under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, 90 percent of middle-class families are seeing a tax cut. For 2018, the typical family of four saw a tax break of more than \$2,000. That is more money every month to put toward a family vacation, a home or car repair, or a kid's braces, or to tuck away in savings for a rainy day.

That is not all. As I said earlier, families aren't just seeing a lower tax bill; they are also seeing more economic opportunity thanks to the economic growth spurred by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act lowered tax rates across the board for owners of small- and medium-size businesses, farms, and ranches. It lowered our Nation's massive corporate tax rate, which up until January 1 of last year was the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. It expanded business owners' ability to recover the cost of investments they make in their businesses, which frees up cash they can reinvest in their operations and in their workers. It brought the U.S. international tax system into the 21st century so that American businesses are not operating at a competitive disadvantage relative to their foreign counterparts.

Those measures have done exactly what they were supposed to do: Get our economy going again. Economic growth is up. Job creation is up. Wages are up. Personal income is up. Business investment is up. Unemployment is down.

Since tax reform was enacted, job growth has averaged 215,000 jobs per month. That is almost twice—almost twice—the monthly average during the Obama administration.

In 2018, for the first time ever, the number of jobs outnumbered the number of jobseekers; 2018 was the first time ever.

The Department of Labor reports that the number of jobs available has now exceeded the number of those looking for work for 12 straight months. Unemployment has now been at or below 4 percent for 13 months. In the last week of March, the number of jobless claims hit its lowest level in 50 years.

U.S. manufacturing, which saw thousands of job losses during the Obama years, is booming. Since tax reform was passed 15 months ago, the manufacturing industry has added thousands of jobs.

Wages have been growing at or above 3 percent for 8 straight months. Since