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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, April 12, 2019, at 2:30 p.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2019

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.

Almighty Savior, the way, the truth and the light, shed Your light today upon the pathway of our Senators. Be for them a source of light, life, and wisdom, as You use them for Your purposes. Lord, keep them on the road of integrity, guiding their thoughts, words, and deeds. As they walk the straight and narrow path, may they not stumble or slip. Give them the wisdom and grace to be worthy stewards of Your mercy, grace, and love. Keep their hearts in warm fellowship with their colleagues and their ears open to the voices of the people they serve.

We pray in Your wonderful 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 proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of David Bernhardt, of Virginia, to be Secretary of the Department of Interior.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 2 minutes as in morning business.

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

MEDICARE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, some officials are proposing radical changes to our healthcare system. These proposals include Medicare for All, Medicare Buy-in, Medicaid for All, and expansion of the Affordable Care Act. All of these are versions of government-run healthcare.

These are, of course, better campaign slogans than serious solutions to the problems facing Americans.

On a certain level, I have found that most people would rather have control over their own healthcare than have the government make those decisions

for them. A single-payer healthcare system would be devastating for our seniors, people with disabilities, and people with preexisting conditions.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Today the Senate will vote to confirm the President's choice to serve as Secretary of the Interior. As I have discussed this week, David Bernhardt is no stranger to the Department. He has served twice before. In fact, this body has confirmed him twice before. Each time his professionalism and dedication proved us right. As Solicitor and as Deputy Secretary, Mr. Bernhardt has offered capable leadership and a firm grasp on the complex policy environment surrounding our Nation's public lands.

His expertise has not gone unnoticed. Praise for Mr. Bernhardt has poured in from a list of more than 40 stakeholder organizations; from agriculture, trade, conservation, and Native American organizations.

They describe him as a leader whose "experience is sorely needed." They laud his commitment to "make the lands he manages accessible to the recreating public."

So we have before us an opportunity to confirm a well-qualified steward of our Nation's public lands and resources. Yesterday, a bipartisan majority of our colleagues voted to end debate on his nomination, and I hope each will join me in voting yes once more later today.

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



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Of course, confirming Mr. Bernhardt will be just the latest in a series of many Executive Calendar accomplishments. Following on the heels of last week's turn back toward the Senate's historic tradition concerning nominations, we have been able to approve a number of the President's nominees at a much more reasonable pace in the last several days.

I have noted, with particular interest that, for all the breathless warnings my Democratic colleagues issued about the kinds of people we would be confirming, these unobjectionable nominees have actually mostly coasted through on a bipartisan basis.

We saw support from both sides of the aisle for Roy Altman to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, and for Daniel Domenico to the District of Colorado.

We saw an overwhelming bipartisan vote in favor of confirming GEN John Abizaid to serve as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and a voice-voted confirmation for Jeffrey Kessler to serve as Assistant Secretary of Commerce.

These are not lightning-rod people whom my Democratic colleagues would have eagerly debated and investigated for an additional 30 hours. They are the kind of thoroughly qualified public servants who used to sail briskly through the Senate without opposition.

Now, even as my Democratic colleagues continue to require us to file cloture on individuals whom they actually go on to support, we are able to fill out the President's team at a more reasonable clip. There are still many empty seats left to fill, but this week's progress marks a great new beginning not just for the administration that needs its personnel but for the health of this institution.

TAX REFORM

Madam President, on another matter, over the past year or so, I have dedicated a large part of my time on the floor to discussing the performance of the U.S. economy, and at no point have I struggled to find things to say.

Seemingly every day, we have been greeted by headlines that tell the same story: Under the political policies of a pro-growth, pro-opportunity Republican agenda, Americans are experiencing a remarkable economic moment.

More than 1 year ago, I mentioned on the floor that weekly jobless claims had reached their lowest level since 1969. Last week, the Labor Department reported that by this measure, the U.S. economy has set yet another new record. What was already a nearly 49-year low has now dipped further to a nearly 50-year low.

My colleagues and I have been busy highlighting the American stories behind these numbers—stories of recovery and prosperity being written in all sorts of communities, in all corners of our country.

More than 1 year since a generational overhaul of the Federal Tax Code lifted burdens from American job creators,

entrepreneurs, and working families, the headlines are continuing to pour in.

With Tax Day just around the corner, millions of working families have filed for the first time under a law that has allowed, according to nonpartisan analysts, the vast majority of Americans to keep more of their money. They have pocketed higher take-home pay, wage increases, and special bonuses, and they benefited from the booming job market these policies have helped ignite.

But old habits die hard. The Washington Democrats who were content to watch as the Obama era piled up 75 percent of new jobs and 90 percent of population growth to the biggest metropolitan areas are back to their same old tricks.

In recent months, we have seen a steady drip of leftist daydreams making their way into press conferences, resolutions, and out on the 2020 campaign trail: a massive rewrite of American election laws and a power grab on an individual's right to exercise political speech, a mandatory, one-size-fits-all government-run replacement for private healthcare for over 180 million Americans, and an estimated \$93 trillion in taxpayers' money to be spent testing out new Federal social planning schemes and abolishing the affordable energy sources American families rely on. Tax Day seems like an especially fitting day to tell Washington Democrats no thanks—no thanks.

The Kentuckians I represent prefer to keep more of their own hard-earned money. They prefer to make their own decisions about their own families instead of ceding more power to bureaucrats.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

H.R. 268

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, Members of the Senate, if you look at the poster I just put up, you know what I am going to talk about—the devastating floods in Iowa and the Midwest.

In Western Iowa, we still have areas underwater from flooding on the Missouri river and its tributaries. In the east, we are dealing with the Mississippi River and tributary flooding. Unfortunately, the weather isn't cooperating with additional storms and rain throughout the Upper Midwest, as I speak, that could exacerbate flooding and hinder cleanup and repairs.

This flooding is still a very active event, but as we move to recovery, we know the original damage estimates in Iowa are increasing. I can say that for Nebraska as well. Many roads are still closed; levy damage is extensive; towns are devastated; and many individuals lost their homes and businesses.

In just 6 of our 99 counties in Iowa, 416,000 acres of cropland was flooded. Much of that cropland is still underwater. These farmers are facing the challenge of not being able to plant this year. Unfortunately, many of

these farmers' fields were just recovering from previous years of major flooding. In this area of Iowa, that would have been in 2011.

This is compounded by many losing their previous harvest through having their on-the-farm storage bins destroyed, as you can see here.

Throughout the Midwest area that had severe flooding, 832 on-farm storage bins have been identified as being like these, destroyed. We don't have a complete estimate of that, but I think 832 on-the-farm storage bins would be at least a figure up to a certain date.

These bins hold an estimated 5 to 10 million bushels of corn or soybeans, so, collectively, that would be a loss of worth between \$17 million and \$34 million.

There is an existing program that goes by the acronym WHIP in the Department of Agriculture that is designed to address agricultural losses not covered by crop insurance and other programs. I reached out to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to see if this program could be used for losses such as those seen here, particularly in Iowa and Nebraska, for corn and soybeans.

I was told because the WHIP program was designed for other commodities affected by hurricanes and wildfires, they needed a few words added to the law to extend the same help to these problems we now have in the Midwest. I asked what those words were, and I spoke to Senator SHELBY, who manages this bill on the floor of the Senate, and to Senator PERDUE, who has a great deal of interest in the bill because of agricultural losses in Georgia. These two Senators agreed to work with me. These two Senators agreed to work with me. So I filed a shorter amendment of a disaster bill along with Senator ERNST and several of my colleagues from the Midwest to make sure that devastation like this is covered. I am optimistic that this simple fix, which will mean so much to farmers facing such unusual catastrophic losses, can be included as the disaster bill moves forward through the Senate.

Yesterday, as another way of helping more than just this type of farmer but, generally, other disaster victims, I joined Senators FISCHER, ERNST, and SASSE in introducing a tax bill that goes by the title of the Disaster Tax Relief Act of 2019. This bill includes a series of disaster tax relief provisions that will help American families and businesses recover from the terrible disasters that have occurred so far in 2019, including the Midwest flooding.

On February 28 I introduced a bipartisan bill with Senator WYDEN that included the same tax relief provisions that would assist the victims of disasters that occurred in 2018. So I view the Fischer bill and the Grassley-Wyden bill as complementary, providing disaster tax relief with respect to the disasters that occurred last year, as well as this year. The bill that I introduced in February also includes extensions of