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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.

Holy God, Your goodness extends to all generations. Thank You that You can be found by all who truly seek You. You are our God, and we trust Your love, wisdom, and power.

Lord, guide our Senators to protect our goodly heritage of freedom, using them to defend our Constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Please, God, hear our fervent prayers, for You are our refuge and strength.

Cause us to live now as we shall wish we had done when our time comes to die.

We pray in Your great 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for 90 seconds.

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

CENTRAL COLLEGE TUITION REDUCTION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I have two points I would like to make. I have three bills designed to help students better understand the actual cost of college because it is kind of a complicated thing to determine because there is not enough transparency.

Colleges tend to think that having a high tuition is a reflection of quality, which just means that they all have to offer more scholarships. Between that and the complexity of Federal student aid, price shopping for college is very difficult and some people might think impossible. That is why I was glad to learn that one of Iowa's well-respected private colleges, Central College in Pella, IA, has lowered its tuition from \$38,600 a year to \$18,600 to better reflect the actual cost. Yes, that is right—they reduced their college tuition by \$20,000 a year. Maybe Pella Central College will start a trend.

REMEMBERING CHUCK GEERTZ

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, on another point, Iowans, and particularly veterans, mourn the loss of Chuck Geertz of Muscatine. Sergeant First Class Geertz was an Active-Duty servicemember for 23 years but continued to serve his Nation after his retirement in 2009, and this is how he did it: through establishing an organization in 2008 called Healing at English River Outfitters or, as he established the acronym, HERO. That organization does great good. It provides veterans and their families with relaxing outdoor activities for physical and mental healing.

Chuck is remembered for his caring spirit and dedication to his community and, most important, his fellow veterans. While he will be missed, his legacy of community service will continue.

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

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 Michelle Bowman, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for a term of fourteen years from February 1, 2020. (Re-appointment)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, it was a good August. While I head back to South Dakota almost every weekend, August gives me the chance to spend multiple uninterrupted weeks back home visiting with South Dakotans and traveling to the far corners of the State.

August is also fair season in South Dakota, and there is nothing better than a South Dakota fair. This year I got to attend the South Dakota State Fair, the Brown County Fair, the Sioux Empire Fair, the Turner County Fair, and the McCook County Fair, to name a few on the list. As usual, I had a great time at all of them. Of course, the people are the best part of the fair, although I have to say that the fair food is not far behind. I am still enjoying at this late date the Tubby Burger

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



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that I had at the Brown County Fair, and I will tell you that they don't have burgers like that here in Washington, DC.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of South Dakota, and, as always, a lot of my conversations over August were centered on agriculture. Farmers and ranchers have had a very rough few years, and addressing the needs of our agriculture community is one of my top priorities in Congress.

One big concern for our producers is ethanol and biodiesel. While we received some good news this year with the approval of year-round E15 sales, the ethanol industry is still facing significant challenges owing to the excess of small refinery waivers that have been issued—an issue we continue to try to address.

Perhaps the biggest concern for our farmers right now is trade. Multiple protracted trade disputes have exacerbated an already struggling ag economy and have left farmers and ranchers unsure how markets are going to be going forward.

While ranchers received some good news in August with the announcement that the administration has reached a deal to increase U.S. beef sales to Europe, that is just a tiny fraction of what we need to be doing trade-wise. Each time I speak with the President and his administration, I tell them what South Dakota farmers have told me: We need to conclude negotiations on the various trade deals we are working on as soon as possible to open new markets and to expand existing ones and to give agricultural producers certainty about what the playing field is going to look like going forward.

One of my priorities right now is pushing for passage of the United States-Mexico-Canada free-trade agreement. The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement will preserve farmers' access to two of our Nation's most significant agricultural export markets—Canada and Mexico—and substantially expand market access for U.S. dairy products in Canada. Negotiations on this agreement have already been concluded. We need Democrats in the House to indicate their willingness to take it up and pass it.

August is always a great time to share with South Dakotans what I am working on in Washington and to get their feedback, which is why I am glad I had the opportunity to host several townhall meetings across the State, toured numerous local businesses, and visited nearly every corner of South Dakota.

As South Dakotans know, I am a longtime member of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. I served as chairman of the committee in the last Congress, and I currently chair the Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet. This has given me the chance to address a number of issues facing Americans and South Dakotans, from the

frustration of illegal robocalls to the data privacy concerns we all face in the internet age. It has also given me the chance to focus on digital issues that affect rural States like South Dakota, particularly the lack of high-speed internet access in rural areas.

To residents of large cities, being without access to high-speed internet is unthinkable, but for families in rural areas, which lack the telecommunications infrastructure of cities and suburbs, even basic internet access can sometimes be a struggle. Broadband access is frequently just a dream, and that has real consequences for these Americans.

It is not just a matter of being able to stream Netflix without interruption. In our digital economy, a lack of reliable, high-speed internet access means losing out on opportunities to grow your business, it means fewer educational opportunities, and it means fewer healthcare resources in areas that already lack easy access to specialty care services. Telehealth promises to reduce some of the geographic barriers to care for individuals in rural areas, but it depends largely on high-speed internet access. Then there is the rapidly developing field of precision agriculture. Precision agriculture, which uses tools like robotics and remote monitoring to help farmers manage their fields, promises to help farmers substantially increase their yields while reducing their costs. But, once again, it depends on reliable access to high-speed internet.

That is why I have made this issue such a priority. Nationwide, the digital divide is shrinking, as more and more Americans gain access to broadband. In South Dakota, we are ahead of the curb, thanks to people like Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken, who has worked aggressively to remove barriers to telecommunications investment in cities like Sioux Falls. I was very encouraged by the Federal Communications Commission's recent announcement that it will invest \$705 million over the next decade to bring broadband to rural areas in South Dakota that currently go without.

There is more work to be done, and I am committed to pushing this issue until reliable broadband access is standard in rural America. During the last week of the August break, I brought the Commerce Committee to Sioux Falls to conduct a field hearing on rural broadband. We brought an FCC Commissioner with us so that he could hear directly from South Dakotans who are on the frontlines of rural broadband expansion and leading the innovations that come along with it. It was a great hearing, and I am very encouraged by the progress we are making on this issue. I look forward to doing more work on this issue in the coming months.

I am energized by the time that I spent with South Dakotans during the August break, and I am looking forward to continuing to fight for South

Dakota's priorities here in Washington this fall.

TRIBUTE TO BRENDON PLACK

Madam President, before I close, I want to take a minute to recognize one of the people who has been instrumental in helping me serve South Dakotans throughout my time in the Senate.

This week, my whip office chief of staff, Brendon Plack, is leaving my office after 14 years. He has been with me during my entire time here in the Senate, from the very first month on the job, and it is difficult to imagine the office without him.

He started out at the bottom, as the guy who had to drive me to evening events so that I could squeeze in a little more work or a few more phone calls to South Dakota on the way. But he was always cheerful about it, and, even better, he drove well and never ran out of gas. It may not sound like a big deal, but having been subsequently stranded on the way to an event after running out of gas, I appreciate, as always, Brendon's preparedness.

Brendon soon moved up to legislative correspondent, then to legislative assistant, and then up from there to policy director, legislative director, staff director, and chief of staff. He has been an indispensable part of my team.

No job has ever been too big for Brendon, no task too hard. It doesn't matter how long the hours get. He is always willing to put in the work that needs to be done, and he stays cheerful through it all, lifting everyone else up with him.

He is a natural leader who is not only exceptionally talented himself but is great at spotting talent in others. He helped me to put together an outstanding team for the whip office and has helped me to maintain an outstanding team in my personal office.

In politics, as we all know, you meet people who are great at the nuts and bolts of policy and know every detail of an issue, and you meet people who aren't as focused on the details but have an ability to see the big picture and how what we are doing fits into our larger goals. You don't always meet people who can do both, but Brendon has always been able to get into the nuts and bolts of a policy and at the same time see the bigger picture.

One of the things I have appreciated most about Brendon is the fact that no matter what we are doing, South Dakota is at the forefront of his mind. As a native of Madison, SD, and the son of a farmer, Brendon has a keen insight into South Dakotans' priorities. Whether it is tax reform or energy legislation or agriculture, Brendon is always thinking about how we can serve South Dakota on the national stage. He has played a key role in so many of the things I have been able to get done for South Dakota here in Washington.

Now, I have described a pretty outstanding individual, but Brendon is not without his flaws. He is a longtime Vikings fan. Over the past 14 years, I