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## Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 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, give our lawmakers this day the wisdom to know Your words and obey Your precepts. As they follow Your leading, may they remember the many times You have delivered them in the past.

Lord, give them the courage to not retreat from life's battles but to faithfully keep their hands in Yours.

Guide us, Great Jehovah. We are pilgrims in this land. We are weak, but You are mighty. Guide us with Your powerful hand.

In the time of our distress, console us with Your merciful presence.

We pray in Your Loving 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 (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

### REMEMBERING TED STEVENS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, later today, I will attend the portrait unveiling of my former colleague and friend, Senator Ted Stevens, who served in the Senate from 1968 until 2009.

This portrait is being added to the Senate leadership portrait collection

because of Senator Stevens' service as the President pro tempore, a position I now hold.

Senator Stevens was known for his tireless work on behalf of the State of Alaska and their citizens. He had quite a reputation for reaching across party lines to get the job done.

I am honored to attend today's ceremony adding Senator Stevens' portrait to the historic walls of the U.S. Capitol.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

### THE FIRST LADY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, first, I want to acknowledge two notable events taking place in the Capitol today.

As we speak, the First Lady of the United States is just down the hall for a special event related to our Nation's opioid epidemic, marking the progress that Congress and the administration have made in recent years and focusing our efforts on the work still ahead.

I will have more to say on the subject tomorrow, which will mark the 1-year anniversary of President Trump signing our landmark opioid legislation into law.

I want to warmly welcome the First Lady to the Senate this morning and thank her for her continued focus on this crisis, which affects so many of

our States. I offer these thanks not only as the majority leader but as the senior Senator from Kentucky, which has been hit hard by this epidemic.

### REMEMBERING TED STEVENS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, later today, in the old Senate Chamber, family, friends, and former colleagues of our late colleague, Senator Ted Stevens, will gather for the unveiling of the Senator's leadership portrait.

Senator Stevens' likeness will join the storied ranks of the leadership portrait collection—images of majority leaders, minority leaders, and Presidents pro tem, which are proudly displayed around the building.

Our distinguished predecessors watch over the corridors they walked, the rooms in which they debated, and the body they served.

It is fitting that Senator Stevens is being recognized for his service as President pro tem. As we all know, unlike the elected party leaders, that is not a job which you can campaign or persuade your way into. The only way to become President pro tem is to persuade your home State, over and over, to rehire you, and Ted Stevens was about the most dogged advocate for his home State that anybody could possibly imagine. He was Alaska's son and Alaska's champion 24 hours a day and then some.

I look forward to honoring our former colleague's memory this afternoon.

### H.R. 4617

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, later today, I understand the House of Representatives will vote on H.R. 4617. This is the latest installment in Speaker PELOSI's campaign to expand government's control over America's political speech.

It is a transparent attack on the First Amendment that has united an

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



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unlikely band of opponents across the political spectrum. Everybody from hardcore conservatives to the ACLU is speaking out against this effort to erode Americans' constitutional rights.

The proposal would give the Federal Election Commission unprecedented license to track and regulate Americans' political speech on the internet and decide what speech qualifies as political in the first place.

If it were not bad enough on principle to fill more Washington, DC, filing cabinets with which citizens hold what beliefs, their bill would also deputize media companies into this effort. They would force publications to keep excessive records for any advertisement they accept not only for political campaigns but on any issue of national importance.

When this regulatory burden has been tried on a smaller scale, it has frightened media platforms into rejecting political ads altogether. It is a textbook example of policy designed to reduce the amount of free speech in our country. Press organizations such as the Washington Post and the Baltimore Sun have already sued over similar regulations on First Amendment grounds and won in court.

House Democrats want to violate the First Amendment and harm journalists in order to give more control to the FEC. That would be the same FEC that Democrats have recently tried to shift from a bipartisan body to a partisan body for the first time in its history.

A different part of the House bill refers to "legitimate journalistic activities." I look forward to hearing what Orwellian commission or process House Democrats may have in mind for determining whether Washington, DC, deems a particular journalist legitimate.

These are just a few examples. Even the ACLU—widely viewed as a left-leaning organization that is not known for siding with Republicans—is publicly opposing the Democrats' bill. Here is what the ACLU said:

"The SHIELD Act . . . strikes the wrong balance, sweeping too broadly and encompassing more speech than necessary. . . . The SHIELD Act goes too far . . . to the detriment of the public and the First Amendment."

That is the ACLU.

Congress has real business to attend to. House Democrats need to stop blocking the USMCA. Senate Democrats need to stop blocking defense funding. Yet, rather than working on these issues, we instead see Democrats continue to fixate—fixate—on chipping away at the First Amendment. It is a pet project they return to time and again. It is disturbing, especially in light of recent blatant attempts to intimidate Americans into silence.

Just a few months ago, a sitting House Democrat earned national criticism when he publicly tweeted out a list of his own constituents in San Antonio, TX, who had donated to President Trump's campaign. He listed these

private citizens' names along with their employers or businesses. In this era of political harassment and online mobs, the implication was clear as day.

From Twitter posts to partisan messaging bills, House Democrats' mission is the same: Chill the exercise of free speech. Send a message to Americans with inconvenient views that speaking up is more trouble than it is worth.

This proposal will not do anything to stop maligned foreign actors—something that every Member of this body cares deeply about. As three former FEC Chairmen recently pointed out, foreign adversaries like Russia are not going to stop their malign operations for fear of an FEC fine. Let me say that again. Adversaries like Russia are not going to stop their malign operations for fear of an FEC fine.

"Campaign-finance law isn't the tool to prevent foreign meddling. . . . Adversaries won't be scared off by civil penalties. . . . This is a job for diplomatic, national security, and counter-intelligence agencies. [This legislation] is a needless sacrifice to First Amendment rights, not a serious effort to secure elections."

That is three former Chairmen of the Federal Election Commission. I certainly agree. It was focusing on defense and counterintelligence, not attacking the First Amendment, that made the 2018 elections go more smoothly than the 2016 elections. That is why the hundreds of millions of dollars Congress has set aside for State grants have made a big difference. That needs to remain our focus as we continue our efforts to avoid repeating the mistakes of 2016.

House Democrats have achieved something remarkable here. They have drafted legislation that is so anti-First Amendment that it has united everybody from former FEC Commissioners, to the ACLU, to yours truly in opposition.

I am sorry that Speaker PELOSI deems go-nowhere messaging bills a better use of the House's time than the USMCA and the 176,000 new American jobs that experts tell us it would create. The American people deserve a House of Representatives that works with the Senate and the President to actually make law and make progress for the families we represent.

#### TAX REFORM

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today Senate Democrats will push forward their own resolution that seeks to undermine part of the historic tax reform we passed in 2017.

Remember, back then, Washington Democrats were downright hysterical about our plan to let working Americans send less of their paycheck to the IRS. Speaker PELOSI called the tax cuts "Armageddon." She said it was "the worst bill in the history of the United States Congress." That is the Speaker on the 2017 tax reform bill. I guess that shows how much Democrats

hate to cut taxes. But tax reform passed, and the results are clear. It has increased Americans' take-home pay and helped generate one of the best economic moments for working families in a generation.

Since tax reform, 22 States, including my State of Kentucky, have set new record-low unemployment rates. The national unemployment rate has set a 50-year low. But, alas, rather than acknowledge that the sky hasn't fallen, our Democratic friends still want to undermine tax reform—and listen to where they have elected to start. Listen to this. Democrats' first target is changing the Tax Code so that working families across the country have to subsidize wealthy people in States like New York, New Jersey, and California.

Here is the background. As part of tax reform, in order to maximize middle-class relief, the deductibility of State and local tax payments was capped. Most middle-class taxpayers were more than compensated for this through other tax cuts, but for some wealthy people who elect to live in high-tax States, this represented a partial increase.

Republicans didn't think it was fair that middle-class working families in States the Obama economy left behind had to subsidize the tax bills of rich people in high-tax States without limit. We didn't eliminate the State and local tax deduction; we just capped it for high earners. That cap is what Democrats want to undermine. Their resolution would help high-tax States—typically governed by Democrats—create workarounds for their high-earners.

Let's be clear about what would happen if Democrats got their real objective and repealed the SALT cap altogether. According to data from the Joint Committee on Taxation, 94 percent of the benefit would flow to taxpayers who earn more than \$200,000 a year. That is what they are advocating. Ninety-four percent of the benefit would flow to taxpayers who earn more than \$200,000 a year. More than half of it would actually go to people who make more than \$1 million a year—cutting taxes for the rich. Repealing the SALT cap would give millionaires an average tax cut of \$60,000. Meanwhile, the average tax cut for taxpayers earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 would be less than \$10. There would be \$60,000 tax cuts for wealthy people and \$10 tax cuts for the middle class. Apparently that sounds like a good trade to our Democratic colleagues. It doesn't sound like good trade to me.

I am sorry to break it to my Democratic colleagues, but the middle-class Kentuckians I represent have zero interest—zero interest—in cross-subsidizing the tax bills of millionaires who live in Brooklyn and the Bay Area.

It is bad enough that my Democratic colleagues want to unwind tax reform, but it is downright comical that their top priority—a top priority—is helping wealthy people in blue States find loopholes to pay even less. They won't even