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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.

Righteous God, refresh our lawmakers as a river in the desert and as the cool shadows of large trees in a hot and weary land. May our Senators find in You a hope that illuminates the paths they travel as You guide them with Your great love.

Lord, fill them with such wisdom that they will solve our Nation's most challenging problems, making the rough places smooth and the crooked places straight. Deal favorably with them because of Your great love and mercy. Inspire them to live lives that will permit You to bless our Nation and world.

We pray in Your mighty 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. ROMNEY). The Senator from Iowa.

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

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

USDA RULEMAKING REVISIONS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I want to tell my colleagues about a disappointment I have in some U.S. Department of Agriculture recent revisions of a proposed rule.

Here is the background: I have long fought to strengthen the safety net so

that Iowa family farmers and other farmers are protected from natural disasters or other unforeseen events that they have no control over, like flooding or wind storms.

Family farmers work hard to make sure that Americans have food on the table. These same family farmers operate on very thin margins. These farmers ought to qualify for help during tough times since losing these operations would risk our Nation's food supply.

However, taxpayers and nonfarm State lawmakers may stop supporting a Federal farm safety net if spending programs aren't held accountable or left unchecked. Losing urban support for this farm safety net is why I am deeply concerned about the USDA's recent proposal to roll back rules that put teeth in the definition of a legal term called "actively engaged in farming."

Long-lost relatives, by changing these rules, who have probably never lifted a finger on the farm should not get away with collecting farm payments. Farm payments should only go to operators that—and I have a definition that is a little facetious but somewhat realistic—unless they have dirt under their fingernails.

A few weeks ago, I recently complimented Secretary Perdue on what I thought were very strong rules that were being proposed at that time. Now the USDA's decision to backtrack on their rules means more megafarmers will take advantage of this loophole and people who aren't actively engaged in farming will benefit from farm payments. I am disappointed with this turnaround.

Once again, Congress must do what it can to oppose these loopholes so that we have only family farmers benefiting from the farm program.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, when I opened the Senate on Monday, I repeated something Republicans have stated for months now. We need to put partisanship aside and get more bipartisan, targeted coronavirus relief out to the American people.

Dating back to the summer, and all fall, Senate Republicans tried repeatedly to advance hundreds of billions of dollars to prevent layoffs, protect small businesses, fund vaccine distribution, and continue assisting workers who have already lost their jobs due to the crisis. Every time, the Speaker of the House and the Democratic leader blocked our efforts. It had to be the entirety of their leftwing wish list or nothing at all.

Finally, this week, we are seeing cracks starting to form in the Democratic leaders' stone wall, and thank goodness for the country that that is finally happening. In the last several days, the Democratic leaders have signaled a new willingness to engage in good faith and, yesterday, a number of Senate Democrats proposed a different compromise.

But at the risk of repeating something we all know, making law will not just require the Senate's approval but also the signature of the President of the United States.

So, after several conversations with the Secretary of the Treasury and the White House Chief of Staff, I put forward yesterday another proposal reflecting what the President is ready to sign into law. What we have proposed would give universities and nonprofits the legal certainty they need. It would create a second draw on the job-saving Paycheck Protection Program to prevent more layoffs, and it would extend

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



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two important emergency unemployment benefit programs that were created by the CARES Act and which will expire in December without action. These programs have been championed by our Democratic colleagues, particularly the senior Senator from Virginia, and we made sure they were included in the framework.

I hope our Democratic colleagues will finally let Congress pass a bipartisan bill that the President will likely sign into law and do so soon.

TRIBUTE TO LAMAR ALEXANDER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, the Senate revolves around people.

The body consists of 100 individuals. One of our key duties concerns the personnel whom we examine and confirm, and there are all these dedicated staff professionals who make this place go.

Today, it is both my great honor and regrettable task to honor someone who secured all three parts of that senatorial triple crown: the senior Senator from Tennessee, the chairman of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, LAMAR ALEXANDER.

LAMAR first set foot here as a talented young staffer. Decades later, he appeared before us as a supersuccessful former Governor and university president with a nomination to the Cabinet. And for the past 18 years, the other 99 of us have gotten to serve alongside one of the most impactful Senators in modern American history.

I have known LAMAR for more than 50 years. We first met in 1969, when I was working for a freshman Senator named Marlow Cook and he worked down in the executive branch. We met at the suggestion of his previous boss and mentor, Senator Howard Baker. Either he suspected our paths might cross again later or he just saw two serious young guys in need of some livelier social lives. Now, this may shock the Presiding Officer, but I am afraid young LAMAR ALEXANDER and young MITCH MCCONNELL did not exactly go crazy and paint the town red. But I will take a five-decade friendship any day.

Both of us headed back home to continue our careers. It was already clear that a bright future in elected office likely lay in store for him.

LAMAR's reverence for public service started early. I believe he was about 10 years old when his father, himself a longtime local official, took him to meet his hometown Congressman, Howard Baker, Sr. The father of his future boss shook the boy's hand and handed him a dime. I think LAMAR was hooked, then and there.

Decades later, when LAMAR announced his 1996 Presidential run, he was in his hometown of Maryville. His speech began with a story about his mother. She had read where he had lovingly described his upbringing as lower middle class, and she had taken umbrage to that. After all, LAMAR had a

library card and music lessons. In her words, "everything you needed that was important."

And I would certainly add loving parents to that list.

This son of two educators grew up steeped in the importance of schooling. He would later reference his mother's work in early childhood education by saying he is probably the only Secretary of Education in history—in history—who spent 5 years in kindergarten.

That passion would remain throughout LAMAR's career. His cutting-edge focus on improving opportunities and reforming education benefited Tennessee hugely in the 1980s, and our whole Nation during his time in President Bush 41's Cabinet.

But that isn't the only way LAMAR has honored his roots. You couldn't walk across the entire State of Tennessee in a plaid shirt, get elected Governor before the age of 40, and serve more combined years as Governor and Senator than anyone else in the history of the Volunteer State without becoming entirely intertwined with the place. Every corner of the State is better for his service. His groundbreaking work to bring home good-paying auto jobs has paid dividends, so has his major focus on infrastructure and better roads.

But alas, even building a statewide and then national reputation does not always, always, translate into honest-to-goodness celebrity status.

I understand that following LAMAR's Governorship, a stretch of highway in Maryville was fittingly named the Lamar Alexander Parkway to honor him. I further understand that sometime later, LAMAR was driving on that very road and stopped for breakfast. When it was time to pay for his food, he handed over his credit card. The woman on the other side of the counter glanced at the name on the card, and then back at LAMAR. "Hey," she said, "were you named after this road?"

Now, as a man of faith, I am certain LAMAR knows Luke, chapter 4: "No prophet is accepted in his hometown." Apparently, neither are statesmen to be recognized on their own highway.

Here in the Senate, too, LAMAR's impact has been massive, and the convictions that fueled it have been straightforward. He starts with a very firm framework: the right-of-center principles that Ronald Reagan used to rebuild a confident, prosperous America and beat communism. The Federal Government isn't meant to take over our States, neighborhoods, or our lives. But LAMAR's career has also confirmed that conservative governance is not a contradiction in terms. There are genuine public goods it is the government's job to secure: public roads, public lands, public education, certain aspects of public health. He has dedicated himself to making those things better and stronger, especially for those who need opportunity the most.

This vision aligns with the greatest traditions of the Republican Party and

indeed of American history—government that is limited but effective and smart; a system where power stays close to the people and working families can thrive and prosper. These principles made our colleague a nationally known leader long before he was sworn in as a Senator. But I would say they have reached full flourishing with Chairman ALEXANDER's astonishingly effective leadership right here in this body.

Students, families, and teachers benefit every day from the Every Student Succeeds Act, Chairman ALEXANDER's historic, bipartisan makeover following No Child Left Behind. One report called it "the largest devolution of federal control to the states in a quarter century."

Millions of medically vulnerable Americans also have their champion in our friend from Tennessee. The overwhelmingly bipartisan 21st Century Cures Act was the single most important law of the entire 114th Congress. It is paving the way for more innovation and faster innovation to benefit patients who have no time to waste—another LAMAR ALEXANDER production.

His leadership was instrumental in the landmark legislation we passed 2 years ago to combat the opioid epidemic.

Just this year, he was the driving force behind the Great American Outdoors Act, the Senate's historic project to secure our parks and public lands for generations to come.

The list doesn't end there. There have been other education wins, like permanent funding for historically Black colleges and universities and simplifying the student loan process. There have been laws like the Music Modernization Act, which LAMAR hammered out with our former colleague, Senator Hatch—a legislative duet from two musical virtuosos in their own rights.

Senator ALEXANDER knows about 50 different issues as well as most Senators know 3 or 4. He is hands down one of the most brilliant, most thoughtful, and most effective legislators any of us have ever seen.

He likes to say this about the Senate: "It's hard to get here; it's hard to stay here; so while you're here, you might as well try to accomplish something." Well, mission accomplished—and then some.

If you reviewed Senator ALEXANDER's resume and results without knowing the man, you might suspect he arrived as an established hotshot and threw his weight around. But even as LAMAR has mastered the levers of power here, his character has never been captured by Washington. LAMAR has remained clear that he has just been on loan from Tennessee the whole time.

So we have had more than just a master legislator to call upon; we have been blessed with a sober, honest, and deliberate statesman—someone who cares as much about preserving this institution as the near-term results he can wring out of it.