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Senate

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the en bloc nominations provided for under the provision of S. Res. 532.

The Senator from Iowa.

OFFICE OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I come to the Senate floor to give an update on one of my oversight projects. This is about an Office within the Department of Health and Human Services that many people may not know much about. It is called the Office of National Security or, in Washington-speak, ONS for short.

This Office informs HHS leadership about the threat landscape and also manages intelligence and counterintelligence. In addition, ONS also aims to protect HHS from disclosure of confidential information and other efforts that undermine U.S.-led research.

I have done oversight of ONS since my chairmanship on the Finance Committee during the 116th Congress. During the COVID pandemic, I successfully fought to ensure that ONS had a seat at the table with the intelligence community so it could lend its expertise however it was needed.

To fulfill its duties to the taxpayers, ONS needs to collaborate closely with national security partners, and the United States needs to be ready to fight health threats head-on—especially that includes domestic and foreign threats. That threat landscape isn't going to go away anytime soon, and it certainly isn't getting any better as pathogens evolve, which means the right hand of government must talk with the left hand of government.

So as part of my continuing oversight, on December 3 of this year, I wrote to HHS Secretary Kennedy and Director of National Intelligence

Gabbard. I asked Secretary Kennedy and DNI Director Gabbard for updates on their level of coordination, and I asked them about their efforts to ensure that ONS is engaged with the broader intelligence community to ensure robust information sharing. In the new year, I look forward to their responses to my investigation.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 majority leader is recognized.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as we wrap up—or are about to wrap up, I should say—our legislative work for 2025, I would say it has been quite a busy year here in the U.S. Senate: the longest session period in 15 years to kick off the year; a historic number of votes—the most, literally, in half a century. In fact, you can see on this chart the number of votes. You go back, the first date on there is 1989. Obviously, this is pretty small and difficult to see, perhaps, unless you are standing right over it, but if you look at the red line here, that is this year. So 653 votes have been cast so far this year, which dwarfs any year going back to 1989, which is what we have data going back to.

We have since researched further back. Turns out there was one year—1976. We went back eight decades. There was one year, in 1976, where the Senate cast more votes than we did this year.

But if you go back to 1989, the closest one is right here—1995, which, for those of us who were actually following it back then, that was the Contract with

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.

O God, our help in ages past, keep our lawmakers under the canopy of Your care. We do not ask You to separate them from life's stresses, strains, and setbacks but to shelter them by Your grace in sunshine and shadows. Accompany them in their coming in, their going out, and their daily work. Make them instruments to advance Your Kingdom. May no weapon formed against them prosper. Lord, encompass them with the everlasting arms of Your love, grace, and mercy.

And, Lord, we praise You for this season of peace and good will to humanity.

We pray in the Name of the Prince of Peace. 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 (Mr. MULLIN). Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

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



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America year, and so that was a record number of votes cast in both I think the House and the Senate. But we have eclipsed that with 613 votes cast in 1995. This year, in the U.S. Senate, we have already cast 653, and we are not quite done yet.

It is historic just in terms of the number of votes cast, the number of hours in session, and the number of days in session; also historic just in terms of the amount of time that we have been around here. So we have put in a lot of time here this year.

I have always said that you can't equate volume of activity or busyness with productivity. Those are sometimes separate metrics. But I would argue that what really matters here is not the number of votes or the number of hours that we worked; it is what we accomplished with those hours.

This has been an incredibly productive Senate, and I am proud to say that we have accomplished a lot this year in the U.S. Senate.

Our flagship bill for the year, of course, was the One Big Beautiful Bill—the working families tax cut act—and the largest part of that was, in fact, the tax cuts that were enacted that are going to benefit American families.

Back in 2017, the Republicans delivered substantial tax relief for hard-working Americans, but that tax relief was scheduled to expire at the end of this month. So one of our main priorities for this year was extending that tax relief. And extend it, we did. But we didn't just extend it. We made it permanent, and we added to it additional tax relief on top. So, now, hard-working Americans can enjoy permanently lower rates, plus an increased standard deduction, a further increase in the child tax credit, a new bonus deduction for seniors, no tax on tips, and no tax on overtime. And that list goes on and on.

In addition to the new and permanent tax relief for individuals and families, we also made permanent important tax relief for businesses of all sizes to help our growth and expand jobs and opportunities for American workers.

I would just say, again, if you look at that map, this measures—again, it is too far away for people to see. But the color coding represents the amount of tax relief that people in these individual States, or even within a State, will receive based upon filings and what we expect they will be filing for next year. But you can see, at the top of that, the U.S. average is \$3,752 in savings, as a result of what we did to prevent what would have been the largest tax increase in American history.

So American families, this next year, and American businesses are going to have more money in their pockets as a result of what we did. Had we not taken those actions, the average family across this country would have seen a \$3,752 increase in their taxes.

So that is sort of representative of the chart across the country, and the

darker ones mean you are probably getting more tax relief relative to the lighter colors. Nevertheless, everyone in this country who files a tax return is going to see a much lower tax bill—tax liability—this next year, as a result of what we did.

That is a lot right there, in and of itself.

The One Big Beautiful Bill didn't end with the working families tax cuts. We also invested in a more secure border and safer streets. We made a historic investment in our national security, and we repealed the Democrats' natural gas tax and took steps to unleash American energy production to ensure Americans have stable, plentiful, and affordable supply of energy. We took measures to modernize the farm safety net, something very important in my State of South Dakota; to address housing costs; and to repair and upgrade our air traffic control system.

I could keep going.

The working families tax cuts and the rest of the One Big Beautiful Bill accomplished a lot for hard-working Americans, but that is not all that we have done in the Senate this year.

The American people elected President Trump last November. One of our priorities this year has been ensuring that the President has his team in place so he can do the job the American people elected him to do. I am proud to report that by the end of this week, we will have confirmed 417 nominees, far more than were confirmed by this point in either President Trump's first term or in President Biden's term. It is even more remarkable—again, you can see this in real form here.

This was President Trump's first term in office, at the end of his first year, which, again, ended 2017. There were 323 of his nominees that had been confirmed. Under President Biden, at the end of the first year, 2021, there were 365 of his nominees who had been confirmed by the U.S. Senate. And, as of today, that number here in 2025, in President Trump's second term, will be 417 nominees. That is important because every President needs to have his team in place to do the job the American people elected him to do.

So as we think about it—and we looked and discussed on the floor yesterday—and you look at the President's first term, what makes it more remarkable was the fact that there was a historic level of obstruction by the Democrats to getting the President's nominees in place. I am talking about something unlike anything we have ever seen in American history for any President of any political party.

If you look at his first term, President Trump remains the only President on record not to have had a single civilian nomination confirmed by unanimous consent or voice vote—the only President on record. Democrats have dragged out the process on almost every single one of the President's nominations, not out of principle but out of petty partisanship.

Any President, going back in history, when they get elected, they get a mandate from the American people, generally in both political parties. I have been here through multiple administrations, both Republican and Democrat, and I have been here in multiple Congresses and Senates, both Republican and Democrat. In every case, particularly when you get past the Cabinet, which we all take very seriously, obviously, there is a process in place, and some of the changes we made to expedite nominations didn't affect Cabinet-level nominees. When you get to the sub-Cabinet level, in many cases, particularly noncontroversial nominees have been approved by unanimous consent or voice vote. It is a way of recognizing that a President needs to get his team in place in order to accomplish the work and the agenda that the American people elected, in this case, President Trump to do.

So what happened this year was historic and unprecedented because most of those lower level Cabinet nominees are done by unanimous consent. That has just been the practice. That has been the precedent. That has been the tradition. That has been the history of the U.S. Senate. And for President Trump, the first President in American history—but as I said, we, as Republicans, haven't let that stop us. So when we close out this year with a total of 417 nominees, we will have the backlog of nominees essentially cleared.

Considering nominations is one responsibility of the government. Funding the government, together with the House of Representatives, is another. One thing that I was determined on when I became leader was to make sure the Senate went about considering the yearly appropriations bills through regular order, a process that gives Senators from both parties the greatest chance to make their voices and the voices of their constituents, I might add, heard. We have done a lot to return the Senate to the regular order process this year.

Appropriations work was unnecessarily delayed by the Democrats' decision to shut down the government for 6 weeks. But despite that, we have had multiple individual appropriations bills signed into law, and the Senate is well on its way to passing five additional bills.

There is a lot more I could talk about when it comes to Senate accomplishments in 2025. We have taken action to repeal a number of burdensome rules and regulations, including the Biden electric vehicle mandate, appliance rules that would have driven up prices for hard-working Americans and businesses, and energy mandates that would have driven up energy prices for American families.

We passed the HALT Fentanyl Act to permanently schedule fentanyl analogs as the most deadly type of drugs. We passed the Laken Riley Act to keep criminal illegal aliens off of our

streets. We passed the GENIUS Act, a landmark bill to create the first U.S. Federal framework for stablecoins and ensure U.S. leadership in financial innovation. We passed the TAKE IT DOWN Act to combat nonconsensual explicit images being shared online. There is so much more that I could talk about.

We tried to do things that, ultimately, were blocked by Democrats, like legislation that would prevent biological males from hijacking opportunities for women and girls in sports.

I guess my point is that it has been a long and challenging year here in the U.S. Senate. I thank all of my colleagues, both Republican and Democrat, and all the staffs, including folks here on the floor, who put in long days and long hours in this last year. I think, as I said, there is a lot to show for it.

If I put up this last chart, you will have a hard time—nobody will be able to read this, for sure. I do this simply to illustrate. This is the list of things that we have accomplished in this last year. It runs the gamut of all the things—some of which I just mentioned and a lot I didn't mention—that were included in the working families tax cuts, the One Big Beautiful Bill that passed last summer. But then there are so many other things on this list that were accomplished as a result of the good work we have done on behalf of the American people here last year.

It is an example of what we all came here to do. Thanks to our work this year, Americans are going to be looking at, one, safer streets; two, more money in their pockets; and, three, new opportunities to get ahead and new opportunities on the way for American people and American families.

Mr. President, we are going to keep advancing those priorities here in the U.S. Senate, in 2026, and build on the record accomplishments and successes that we have had here in 2025.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. 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 MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night, Donald Trump gave a speech about how supposedly great his first year has been. So, of course, his speech was short because there is really not much to say about how great Trump has been.

For 18 minutes, the President, last night, tried to convince Americans the sky is green and that trees can walk. He yelled at the camera and said that things are somehow going great even

though costs are up. He said he is doing a great job in office—all of which is, obviously, false. And the American people didn't buy it.

It was clear, in watching the speech, that the President didn't want to be there. The only thing Americans saw last night was a very rich President trapped in a bubble, forced by his advisers to give a speech he didn't want to give. It is like your cousin who can't sit still for a Christmas photo, only this is the President of the United States.

Our country is in a lot of trouble right now, but instead of giving Americans a plan on how we will lower their costs, Donald Trump played the blame game. That is so typical of him. Instead of solving a problem, which is what a good President is supposed to do, he just points fingers at other people, and that doesn't do a bit of good to get the American people back on the right track. It is never a good sign when the President begins a speech by saying, "I inherited a mess," because that is just another way of telling people: I don't want to be responsible for any of this.

Again, President Trump's speech showed he lives in a bubble—a billionaire bubble—completely disconnected from the reality that everyday Americans are seeing and feeling. People are feeling squeezed harder and harder every day, and Donald Trump, last night, took a victory lap.

Now let's talk about one of the most important issues for Americans when it comes to costs: healthcare.

Last night, Donald Trump offered exactly zero solutions for how we are going to lower Americans' healthcare premiums. He kept blaming Democrats. He kept saying the healthcare crisis is not his fault.

But here are the facts—the immutable facts—Donald Trump: No amount of finger-pointing, lying, hyping it up, or patting yourself on the back is going to undo the fact that the American people are going to pay a lot more for healthcare come January 1.

On January 1, the ACA enhanced premium tax credits are going to expire because Donald Trump chose to let them die.

Even our Republican colleagues have told us time and time again that if Trump would do something here and support an extension of the tax credits, as we Democrats are fighting for, then maybe they would be able to do something. But he doesn't.

Now tens of millions are going to see their insurance premiums double on average. Four million people will lose insurance because Donald Trump let it happen, and he is there, sitting in front of the TV camera, patting himself on the back—unbelievable. Millions more with private insurance will see their premiums go up because Donald Trump let it happen. Our emergency rooms are going to be even more overrun. People are going to be kicked out of nursing homes. Rural hospitals will close. And

there is Donald Trump congratulating himself on how great he is.

Look, because of Republicans' total inaction on healthcare, huge damage has already been done, and nothing we do after January 1 can undo so much of that damage. As I have said before, the toothpaste is out of the tube.

However you want to say it, the point is this: Because of Republicans, it is now impossible, sadly, to prevent people from having to pay hundreds, if not thousands, more on their premiums next year. It is going to start January 1.

Even if we can figure out a way to stop the bleeding next year—that is a very big "if"—Republicans are still in shambles and have no plan themselves. For too many people, it is going to be too late because Republicans chose to let these ACA tax credits expire. They had an easy opportunity to join us in our 3-year, clean extension of the ACA credits, and they refused.

Well, Americans heard none of what they wanted to hear last night during Trump's speech—nothing about how he will lower premiums, nothing about how he will lower their cost of living, nothing about how Republicans could have fixed this crisis but didn't. Donald Trump kept playing the blame game. Many a President has tried to do that—all with disastrous results. People want solutions; Donald Trump gave them none.

Democrats, meanwhile, are not going to stop fighting to lower people's premiums, and we are not going to stop fighting to lower costs across the board and help Americans pay for the things they need and avoid those moments on Friday night when families sit around the kitchen table and say: How the hell am I going to pay this bill? I don't have the money for it. I need what the bill has asked me to pay for.

Look, we Democrats will not stop fighting to lower costs and help Americans pay for the things they need. These will be our watchwords in 2026: lower costs and lower healthcare costs in particular.

That issue ain't going away, Republicans. We are going to keep on it and on it and on it until maybe you join us to really solve the problem.

Republicans, healthcare is not going away. People need help to afford premiums, and Democrats are going to keep fighting and pushing this issue for all of 2026 and beyond.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. President, on the CR, Democrats want to get our work done to finish the bipartisan appropriations process. Our goal is a bipartisan bill that funds the government through fiscal year 2026.

Republicans worked for over a month and just yesterday gave Democrats a list of their cleared amendments, one of which has no text.

While I don't expect we will need quite as long as Republicans took, it will still take some time for us to work through our amendments so that we can finish the minibus in January.