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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable ROGER MARSHALL, a Senator from the State of Kansas.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who taught us it is more blessed to give than receive. As we prepare to celebrate Presidents Day, thank You for the great gift of leadership. May this wonderful ability to mobilize people toward a shared objective become the strength of our legislative branch. Help our lawmakers find the correct balance that leads to true influence.

Lord, give them the wisdom to prefer listening to speaking and learning to teaching, as they seek to make bipartisan progress. Infuse them with the serenity to accept the things they cannot change, the courage to change the things they can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

We pray in your wonderful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

The senior assistant executive clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 13, 2025.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable ROGER MARSHALL, a Senator from the State of Kansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MARSHALL thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADERSHIP TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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 executive clerk read the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this morning the Senate will vote on the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services. By now, it is beyond

clear that Mr. Kennedy is not remotely qualified to become the next Secretary of HHS. In fact, Mr. Kennedy might be one of the least qualified people that Donald Trump could have chosen for the job. There are so many others that would have been better.

I am very proud that every single Democrat will oppose Mr. Kennedy's nomination, because Democrats know better than to elevate a conspiracy theorist to the top healthcare job in the country.

I know some of my colleagues feel the same way privately. In fact, if the Senate held a secret ballot today, I would bet Mr. Kennedy would never come close to becoming confirmed and that many, if not most, Republicans would vote against him. I think, most likely, most Republicans would vote against him if there were a secret ballot.

But, sadly and unfortunately for America, Republicans are being strong-armed by Donald Trump and will end up holding their nose and voting to confirm Mr. Kennedy—what a shame, what a travesty.

I urge my Republican colleagues to think very carefully, one last time, before rolling the dice—before rolling the dice—on Mr. Kennedy.

A vote to confirm Mr. Kennedy is a vote to make America sicker. Mr. Kennedy has made a living not by promoting public health but by actively fighting it. Mr. Kennedy is the face of the modern anti-vaccine movement. Mr. Kennedy has spent decades profiting off vaccine misinformation.

Mr. Kennedy told me to my face that he would “defer to the President” on issues as personal, as deeply held, as important as abortion. How do we know that Mr. Kennedy won't defer to the President—who is far from an expert on healthcare—on other issues and healthcare issues as well? It is simple: We don't. But if he can change his view and defer to the President on something as deeply held as abortion, the

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



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S957

likelihood is he will change his view on many other healthcare issues, to the detriment of the American people. One thing he won't change his views on is vaccines. I am sure because he has held that so deeply.

My Republican colleagues should think very carefully before voting to elevate a vaccine skeptic and conspiracy theorist to oversee our healthcare system.

If confirmed, I fear greatly that Mr. Kennedy will take steps that severely undermine public health, weaken safety standards, and put the needs of for-profit corporations ahead of the needs of American families.

Sooner or later, public backlash is going to build, and Republicans will have wished they hadn't signed their names for such a troubled nominee. So one final time—one final time—I implore my Republican colleagues to reject the nomination of Mr. Kennedy to be Secretary of HHS. A vote to confirm Mr. Kennedy is a vote I truly believe many, many Republicans and most Americans will eventually very deeply regret.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, now on costs, lowering costs for average families in the budget resolution. Well, my colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, my fellow Americans, welcome to the age of Trumpflation—Trumpflation. If there was one mandate that Donald Trump had after winning the election, it was to fight inflation. Remember what he said on the campaign trail? He said:

When I win, I will immediately bring prices down starting on Day One.

Starting on day one, he said he will bring prices down. Well, today is day 25, and inflation is not down but actually up by 3 percent—higher than what economists were expecting. At the grocery store, the price of pork and chicken and beef are all up. Eggs are up 15 percent from last month. Gas prices are up 2 percent from last month. Used cars are up. Auto insurance has become more expensive. And what is Donald Trump doing about all this? He is making the problem worse by threatening trade wars with our own allies.

Here is what the CEO of Ford Motor Company said yesterday. The CEO of Ford Motor Company warned yesterday that “a 25 percent tariff across the Mexico and Canada borders would blow a hole in the U.S. industry that we've never seen.” That is the head of Ford Motor. That is not some liberal Democratic economist. The head of Ford Motor says that tariffs will blow a huge hole—a hole in the U.S. auto industry.

What he is doing on tariffs is, again, sort of like everything else. It is sort of a meat-ax approach, a slash-and-burn approach, not looking at each individual case and seeing what is good and what is bad.

Inflation is the No. 1 issue on people's minds. It was the biggest issue during the election. And already, Donald Trump is breaking his promise to

do something about it. The American people are starting to take notice already, even though we are only on day 25 of Trump's term. A recent CBS poll showed that 66 percent of voters do not think Trump is focused enough on lowering prices. Sixty-six percent of voters do not think Donald Trump is focused enough on lowering prices. And do you know what? They are absolutely right.

In the 3 weeks that Donald Trump has been President, he has been focused on pretty much everything but fighting inflation, which is the No. 1 thing people care about. We have seen this maneuver so many times before from Donald Trump. He knows that he has no real answers to fixing inflation, so what does he do? He distracts. He distracts. He says ridiculous and wild, strange things hoping to distract the country from the fact he is not doing his job. It is why he talks about things like renaming the Gulf of Mexico. It is why he is talking about hotels in Gaza. It is why he is talking about annexing Canada. None of these things have anything to do with the thing that matters most—lowering the cost of living for average American families.

Meanwhile, what are the Republicans doing here in Congress? What are my Senate Republican colleagues doing? Are they fighting inflation maybe? No way. No way. Republicans are full steam ahead with cutting taxes for the ultrarich, paid for on the backs of working- and middle-class families.

Just look at the gargoyle-like budget proposal that the House Republicans released yesterday. Republicans want to make billionaires even wealthier by raising costs for working people. The Republican budget slashes nutrition programs that help 40 million Americans put food on the table. The Republican budget proposes massive cuts to Medicaid, threatening healthcare for tens of millions of people. It will make food, healthcare, energy, and housing more expensive—all to cut taxes for the ultrarich, hurting the middle class, raising costs for the middle class to help the ultrawealthy. The Republican budget plan can be described in one word: “radical.”

Republicans should remember well what happened the last time they cut taxes for the ultrawealthy. It backfired with the rest of America. If Republicans try to cut taxes for the ultrarich again, history is going to repeat itself, and it will cost them dearly at the ballot box.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF BROOKE ROLLINS

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I am honored to speak on the floor of the

Senate and support Brooke Rollins to be Secretary of Agriculture. The Senate will vote on her nomination in this Cabinet position today, and I encourage my colleagues to vote yes.

America's farmers, ranchers, and foresters need a leader at USDA who will be an advocate for their livelihoods and rural America and be a strong voice to address the pressing needs of our agriculture community. Brooke Rollins is that person. In her hearing before the Senate Agriculture Committee, she pledged to do everything within her ability to ensure that our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities thrive. And we know she will follow through on that because rural America helped shape her into what she is today.

She is leading a life of service that began with membership in her smalltown Texas FFA chapter. She continues to credit her FFA adviser for his support and mentorship in her agriculture career. She invited him to attend the nomination hearing before the Senate Agriculture Committee last month, along with the Texas State FFA officer team she served with in high school.

Texas Governor Rick Perry knew Brooke Rollins had a heart for Texas farmers and invited her to join his policy team, where she advocated for agriculture. She continues that passion today.

Her executive leadership during the first Trump administration and her regular collaboration with President Trump make her uniquely qualified to serve in this position and advocate for family farms.

She understands the significant responsibility of this role during one of the most economically challenging times for agriculture producers. Hard-working farmers who grow our food are struggling to operate, let alone make a profit in this current economic climate. High inflation and steep input costs far outpacing depressed market prices have put many farm families on a course toward bankruptcy, with multigenerational operations fighting to continue their family legacies.

In December, Congress approved natural disaster and emergency assistance to help producers obtain critical operating loans for this crop year. Ensuring delivery of this aid will be one of her first priorities as Secretary. I am confident she will pursue policies to help rural America live up to its potential.

While we first met during the first Trump administration, I have had the opportunity to get to know her better during her confirmation process, and she has demonstrated her enthusiasm for being a voice for smalltown American agriculture producers. I am grateful she is willing to take on this big responsibility and is willing to be a part of the solution to help rural America at this time of unprecedented challenges.

As chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I have met with