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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.

Sovereign Lord, through all the generations, You have been our refuge and strength. You are without beginning or ending. Lord, how fleeting are life's seasons. We disappear like grass that springs up in the morning but, by evening, has begun to wither.

Guide our lawmakers as they seek to confront the problems of our time with Your solutions. Lord, give them stability and serenity as they strive to accomplish Your purposes. Help them to see their legislative work as a divine calling and mission. And, Lord, bring peace to our troubled world.

We pray in Your sacred 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ARMSTRONG). 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 pro-

ceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Sheria Akins Clarke, of South Carolina, to be United States District Judge for the District of South Carolina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

FOSTER CARE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, you might wonder how this Senator from Iowa gets involved in issues of foster youth.

Thirty years ago, I hired a staffer from Urbandale, IA, by the name of Sara Gesiriech. Sara now works for the First Lady in the White House on this issue of foster care. She was hired by me to work on banking and education issues, but she came to me 1 day and said: I was adopted by my parents, and there are a lot of things wrong with the foster care system in the United States.

So she said to me: Do you care if I work on that issue as well as the other issues you hired me to work on?

So that is the story behind my being involved with foster care issues.

You learn to listen to these kids who go from home to home maybe three times a year and change schools three times a year. If you listen to them, they say: I would like to have a mom and dad. I would like to have a permanent home. And that touches your heart.

The need to support children in America who want a mom and dad is more important now than it was even 30 years ago.

In 2025, there was an increase in the number of children who entered and were in foster care compared to 2024. Now, that increase is not the case in each and every State. For example, in Iowa, there was a slight decrease in the number of children in foster care from 2024 to 2025, demonstrating Iowa's success in supporting children and families.

At the Federal level, I am committed to exploring policy solutions that improve long-term outcomes for children in foster care. So the bill that I am introducing—the bipartisan bill that goes by the title of Recruiting Families Using Data Act—modifies decades-old Federal requirements and empowers States to develop family partnership plans that incorporate best practices with quality data. By integrating quality data and best practices, States are better equipped to address the needs of children in their care.

Today, I am releasing the discussion draft of legislation to support older youth in foster care. I do that by providing an opportunity for States to expand on services that help these young people achieve independence.

My draft legislation would also require the Government Accountability Office to study the funding formulas used to allocate Federal funds to States as part of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. That is a long name for a program written 25 or 30 years ago by former Senator Chafee of Rhode Island, who was also very much interested in this issue.

In January of 2025, the Government Accountability Office published a report that studied how States use the Chafee program to support older foster youth who are transitioning out of foster care, which is natural when they reach a certain age. Sometimes it is 18. Sometimes it might be a little bit older. Aging out of foster care is a traumatic time for these kids.

I asked for this report after it was brought to my attention that Chafee dollars were being returned while also hearing that not all eligible youth were being served by the program. As a cofounder and cochair of the Senate Caucus on Foster Youth, I continually hear of the challenges that foster youth face as they approach adulthood and how they can be better supported.

By the way, I would like to thank Senator LUJAN of New Mexico for his

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



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cochairing this committee with me; so it is a very bipartisan effort.

Now, after getting this report, I look forward to getting feedback on how Federal programs can encourage foster youth to achieve self-sufficiency. We have a responsibility to protect children and their well-being.

As we recognize the month of May as being National Foster Care Month, it is my hope that we can continue to find solutions to see that every child has the chance to build a bright future and an opportunity for permanent and loving homes.

I want to congratulate First Lady Trump for her efforts in this area and in her recently holding a hearing in the House of Representatives on this issue.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill 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.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, yesterday marked 500 days of the Republican majority here in the U.S. Senate, and what a busy 500 days it has been. We have taken close to 800 votes since last January, confirmed just under 500 nominees to posts across the Federal Government and judiciary, and we have passed bills out of the Senate and into law to make life better for the American people.

When Republicans took over last year, we set out to address cost-of-living issues and put more money in Americans' pockets. We lifted costly Biden-era regulations, from rules that would have driven up the cost of household appliances to rules that would have forced Americans into expensive electric vehicles.

At the start of this year, we took action to drive down the cost of prescription drugs at the pharmacy counter. In March, the Senate passed the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act—a bill that cuts redtape that has prevented the construction of new housing and kept too many Americans waiting to realize the American dream of home ownership. I am proud of the broad bipartisan support this bill received here in the Senate, and I hope these common-sense reforms will make it to the President's desk in short order.

Lifting costly regulations and taking action to lower the cost of prescriptions and housing are significant actions, but what I consider to be the most consequential action not just of this majority but of my entire time in the Senate is the Working Families Tax Cut. And I say "most consequential" because of the permanent tax relief Republicans delivered in this bill—tax relief that puts more money in

hard-working Americans' pockets. That was the centerpiece of this bill, and a whole lot of Americans saw that last month when they filed their tax returns and saw a significantly higher refund.

Hard-working Americans were able to take advantage of permanently lower tax rates, an increased standard deduction, and the 2,200 child tax credit. Six million workers deducted income from tips, 25 million workers took advantage of no tax on overtime, and 30 million seniors were able to reduce their tax burden with the \$6,000 senior deduction created by this bill.

The Working Families Tax Cut lets hard-working people keep more of their hard-earned money. It also strengthens America's small businesses and family farms and ranches. Lower tax rates and the 199A small business deduction free up money for them to invest in their operations and their employees. Investment incentives like 100 percent bonus depreciation and immediate research and development expensing help them upgrade and innovate. And a lot of family business owners, farmers, and ranchers breathe a sigh of relief when this bill passed because it protects them from a potentially devastating death tax bill, not to mention the costly estate planning expenses that come along with this tax.

These measures are part of Republicans' focus on strengthening America's economy. An important part of that is strengthening our agriculture economy. America's farms and ranches have faced some serious headwinds lately. Higher input costs, depressed commodity prices, higher interest rates, and natural disasters and disease are just some of the challenges ag producers have faced in recent years. So Republicans set out to deliver some much needed relief to the ag sector.

In the Working Families Tax Cut, we made lasting reforms to strengthen the farm safety net. Thanks to this bill, reference prices for commodity programs more closely reflect the actual market conditions farmers are dealing with. We bolstered crop insurance, and we improved the Livestock Indemnity Program and Livestock Forage Disaster Program to help ranchers and other livestock producers through challenging times. But we still have more to do to strengthen the agricultural economy. Senators BOOZMAN and HOEVEN are working on a farm relief package to address the challenges facing farmers right now.

Allowing the year-round sale of E15 fuel is another priority. Year-round E15 is something that helps not only the ag economy but the overall economy by reducing fuel costs and allowing for more homegrown energy. The House has passed a bill to allow year-round E15, and we will be having discussions on how to accomplish that goal in the Senate in the near future.

Republicans have also made it a priority to combat waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Government. The

Working Families Tax Cut included a number of reforms to focus Federal dollars on those most in need, guard against the abuse of taxpayer funds, and hold States accountable for the Federal funding they receive.

New measures in the law prevent noncitizens from receiving Federal healthcare and nutrition benefits and refocus those programs on serving American citizens. The law requires States to be good stewards of Federal programs like Medicaid and nutrition assistance, and it takes aim at duplicative enrollment in Federal healthcare programs, which CMS estimates costs taxpayers as much as \$14 billion per year.

Earlier this year, President Trump signed into law Senator KENNEDY's bill that helped prevent the payment of Federal benefits to deceased individuals. And after revelations of widespread fraud in the State of Minnesota at the end of last year, we confirmed the first-ever Assistant Attorney General for National Fraud Enforcement.

Then there are our actions to ensure Washington is a better steward of taxpayer dollars. The Working Families Tax Cut prevented Americans' tax dollars from funding big abortion providers for 1 year. Last summer, Republicans passed a rescissions package that targeted funding that had gone to some egregious misuses of taxpayer dollars, like a pride parade in Lesotho and promoting vegan food in Zambia. We continue to work to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not being wasted.

I said at the outset of this Congress that I wanted to restore regular-order consideration of appropriation bills, and we were largely able to accomplish that goal, even after Democrats tried to derail the process with the longest government shutdown in history this past fall.

This year, we were able to pass 11 of the 12 full appropriations bills into law, and many of those bills actually spent less money than if we had just put spending on autopilot through a continuing resolution.

The only reason we haven't passed 12 out of 12 full appropriations bills this year is that Democrat colleagues apparently don't believe in securing our Nation's borders. Their refusal to provide even a dollar for the Border Patrol in this year's DHS funding bill is ample evidence of that.

Republicans most certainly believe in border security. In fact, addressing the dangerous situation at our southern border was one of our top priorities when we took over last year. The first bill we passed was the Laken Riley Act to ensure that illegal immigrants who committed certain crimes are not allowed back on our streets. We passed the HALT Fentanyl Act to give law enforcement the tools it needs to go after this deadly poison, much of which flows across our southern border.

The Working Families Tax Cut made a generational investment in border security, and we are seeing the results of