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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.

O God of time and eternity, we come to You not because we are perfect, but because we also need Your mercy, wisdom, and love. By Your grace, we are able to triumph over evil, living no longer for ourselves alone, but for You.

Give our Senators a vision of the goal that produces righteousness, unity, and justice. Use our lawmakers to bring understanding, peace, and patience to Capitol Hill. Empower them to serve the less fortunate, to bear the burdens of freedom, and to labor for Your glory.

And, Lord, bless those who are going through this season of lent. We pray in Your merciful 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. MULLIN). 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 legislative clerk read the nomination of Ryan McCormack, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

KOSOVO

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, 2 weeks ago, I talked about Lithuanian Independence Day; yesterday, Estonia's Independence Day. Today, I have another country, but I don't want my colleagues to think that I am going to be speaking about the Independence Day of all 200 nations on the face of this Earth. In fact, I know very few of their Independence Days.

But because the United States and my State of Iowa has a close relationship with Kosovo, I want to recognize that Tuesday, February 17, was that Republic's Independence Day; that is, the 18th anniversary of Kosovo's Declaration of Independence in the year 2008.

Also, next month will mark 15 years of Kosovo-Iowa National Guard partnership. Many Iowa National Guard members have served in Kosovo, starting with the NATO mission there, to working with the Kosovo Security Force as part of the National Guard State Partnership Program. Both my State of Iowa and Kosovo have found this partnership to be very beneficial, so much so that it has grown into a whole sister state relationship.

Our Governor Reynolds and the president of the Kosovo exchange visits and keep in contact, and that close working relationship extends down to other Iowa and Kosovo Government officials.

Kosovo and Iowa have also developed close ties in areas like trade and education, in addition to the national security concerns of both countries. People from Kosovo have attended Iowa's educational institutions, and Kosovo has even established a consulate in our capital city of Des Moines.

When you look at the polling of which countries have a favorable impression of the United States, Kosovo often comes up on top. I am proud that my State has such a close relationship with arguably the most pro-American country in the world. Our State and the country of Kosovo both benefit from the ties that we continue to build. I know that both Iowans and people of Kosovo cherish our partnership, and I look forward to that partnership continuing to grow.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative 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, last July, Republicans passed the landmark Working Families Tax Cut Act into law. This is a bill that is full of wins for the American people. It delivers safer streets, puts more money in Americans' pockets, and it creates new opportunities to get ahead.

As they file their taxes this year, hard-working Americans are beginning to see just how significant the tax relief is for them.

Last week, I was home in South Dakota, and I heard directly from South Dakotans about the impact the Working Families Tax Cut Act is having in our State.

I visited manufacturing facilities. I talked to business owners. I even met with some accountants about what they are seeing as they file returns for their clients. And one thing is clear, the Working Families Tax Cut Act is working for South Dakota.

Last week, I joined a roundtable at Montgomery's in Sioux Falls by the

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South Dakota Retailers Association. I heard from a number of local businesses, from our car dealerships to a cupcake shop, and business owners from around South Dakota had positive things to say about the Working Families Tax Cut Act.

Todd Pharis, a Pizza Ranch franchisee in Sioux Falls, hailed the much needed certainty provided by the new tax law. Pro-growth provisions like bonus depreciation, research and development expensing, and the 199A small business deduction are now permanent, meaning businesses like Todd's can plan for the future and invest in their operations and in their employees.

Jim Lake, who owns car dealerships around South Dakota, said that 100 percent bonus depreciation enabled them to build a large addition to one of his dealerships and hire 10 new employees.

The owner of Harms Oil also talked about the significant reinvestment from bonus depreciation that benefits South Dakota businesses and the communities they serve.

Paul Forst from Agtegra Cooperative talked about how the 199A small business deduction is directly helping South Dakota farmers. He said his cooperative has opted to pass more than \$100 million in 199A benefits directly to South Dakota farmers since the deduction was created in 2017, and the farmers have invested that savings in new equipment, infrastructure, and jobs.

Then there is the death tax relief that we passed. The death tax relief that we passed—I mentioned that this roundtable was at Montgomery's furniture store in Sioux Falls. And I think it is worth noting that Montgomery's has been a family-owned business since 1888, the year before South Dakota became a State. It is currently run by the fourth and fifth generations in South Dakota. The sixth generation is learning the ropes.

Family-run businesses like Montgomery's aren't unique in our State. South Dakota is home to a number of family-owned businesses and family farms and ranches that have been passed down from one generation to the next.

Thanks to the working families tax cut, hard-working Americans who run their own businesses are breathing a sigh of relief because this landmark bill protects a lot more family-owned businesses from a potentially devastating death tax bill when the business passes to the next generation, as well as costly estate planning expenses. That is something that matters to a lot of folks who came to the roundtable last week and for business owners, farmers, and ranchers across South Dakota.

I have talked this morning about how the working families tax cut provides tax relief to South Dakota businesses. Those benefits are significant, but I should note what most excited the business owners at last week's round-

table wasn't the tax benefits for themselves; it was the benefits that their employees and the customers are going to see.

Todd Pharis, the Pizza Ranch franchisee said this:

The two that are going to help us the most, or at least our employees, are the no tax on tips and the no tax on overtime, which will give our employees more money, and . . . we'll actually be able to give them more overtime.

Melissa Johnson who owns Oh My Cupcakes! in Sioux Falls said of her employees:

With the no tax on tips and no taxes on overtime, it has already resulted in [my employees] having higher tax refunds so they can buy things they need for their families. My head chef just bought a baby crib because of a higher refund . . . It's really affected my team in positive ways.

And Eric Sinclair who owns Montgomery's had this to say:

Anytime the general consumer can get more back in their pocket with tax cuts, we hope they come into our stores and maybe buy something nice for their home, make their surroundings even more beautiful.

By all accounts, those bigger tax refunds are beginning to land in hard-working Americans' bank accounts. The IRS is reporting a significant increase in the average refund this year. And just recently, I got this message from a retiree in South Dakota who wrote:

Just did my income taxes. Putting more money in my pocket than last year . . . I am not a billionaire or a millionaire or even a hundreds of thousands thousandaire—just a retired senior citizen who appreciates that the middle class gets a break once in a while.

That is what the working families tax cut is all about. Whether you are a small business owner, a farmer, a rancher, or a senior citizen, or someone just trying to make ends meet and provide for your family, the working families tax cut puts more money in your pocket empowering Americans to spend, invest, and save their money how they see fit. And it is setting our country and the American people up for a much brighter future.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative 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.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

HOUSING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ACT—Motion to Proceed

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 343, H.R. 6644.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 343, H.R. 6644, a bill to increase the supply of housing in America, and for other purposes.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 343, H.R. 6644, a bill to increase the supply of housing in America, and for other purposes.

John Thune, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Katie Boyd Britt, Jim Banks, John Barrasso, John R. Curtis, Kevin Cramer, Joni Ernst, Pete Ricketts, Bernie Moreno, Markwayne Mullin, Mike Crapo, Ted Budd, Roger F. Wicker, James Lankford, Chuck Grassley, Cindy Hyde-Smith.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call in relation to the McCormack nomination.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

IRAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, U.S. and Iranian officials are holding talks in Geneva as America stands at the brink of another potential conflict in the Middle East.

Earlier this week, Senate leaders and I met with Secretary Rubio. Everyone is asking what the plan is with respect to Iran, and we are all looking for answers that the administration has refused to give.

The issues we discussed in our classified briefing were very serious, and the American people deserve to hear it directly from the President and his administration. The administration should come clean and tell the American people exactly what the goal is in Iran.

I have always said that confronting Iran and halting its nuclear ambition requires a strategy, clarity, and transparency. Thus far, we are getting none of that from the administration. The American people deserve answers.

EPSTEIN FILES

Mr. President, on Epstein, the way Pam Bondi and the Justice Department handled the release of the Epstein files has all the stench of a coverup.

Yesterday, news outlets reported that several memos detailing a woman's accusation against the President from when she was a minor have been withheld from the public. We know