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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable LUTHER STRANGE, a Senator from the State of Alabama.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's prayer will be offered by Father Steven E. Boes, executive director of Boys Town in Boys Town, NE.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Lord God, we recognize today, on Pearl Harbor Day, the sacrifices of those young men and women who gave their lives for their country.

Lord God, in these troubled times of fires and floods and hurricanes and terror attacks and mass shootings, help us to rely on Your strength to envision and build a stronger and more secure America. Give us more visionaries like Father Edward Flanagan, who founded Boys Town on December 12, 100 years ago. Father Flanagan was an Irish immigrant who lived the American dream and taught us all that even the most troubled child could grow up to be a useful citizen if given half the chance. He saw the best in the kids whom others rejected as useless.

Help us but especially each of our Senators to see the best in those who have different political or social views so that we can, together, build an America that enables and calls forth the best in its citizens.

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. HATCH).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 7, 2017.

To the Senate:

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

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise today to thank Father Steven Boes from Boys Town for delivering our opening prayer this morning. The work he does to help at-risk youth across America is awe-inspiring, and I am proud to say that he is a Nebraskan.

Boys Town is a special place, and it is located in the heart of our country. In the late 1910s, while ministering to the homeless of Omaha, Father Edward Joseph Flanagan became interested in young people and their struggles to grow into responsible, productive adults. He wanted to help them improve their lives, and he soon founded Boys Town on December 12, 1917, as an orphanage for boys.

A few years later, Father Flanagan purchased Overlook Farm on the outskirts of Omaha, which soon became known as the Village of Boys Town. He knew that children would thrive if given love, a home, and a purpose. His message that every child deserves a loving home and a chance to create a positive future for themselves is one that resonates across social boundaries.

Today, Boys Town is one of the largest nonprofits in the country, serving underprivileged and at-risk children. Father Boes's leadership at Boys Town is a tribute to Father Flanagan's mission to build better communities by promoting stronger families. For nearly 100 years, Boys Town has worked tirelessly to nurture troubled children and heal broken families. Every year, the organization helps more than 2 million children and families across the United States.

Boys Town also has a renowned school, which offers a year-round traditional academic curriculum that focuses on helping students, especially those who are behind in their school work. It helps children in difficult circumstances find success in the classroom, as well as get back on track toward graduation.

The school's motto echoes that of the organization as a whole: "He ain't heavy, Father, he's my brother." I believe that motto is a great explanation of why we are celebrating Boys Town's 100th anniversary next week. For a century, through terrible depressions, horrible world wars, droughts, and snowstorms, Boys Town has served as a glimmer of hope for many who are looking for help.

I don't think Father Flanagan would be surprised to learn that Boys Town has grown to include 12 regional headquarters across our great Nation or that his charity really has become a jewel of the nonprofits. His outlook created a firm foundation for helping our communities, and it is one that Father Boes continues to build on.

That deserves to be celebrated. I am happy that on July 6, 2015, the Boys Town Centennial Commemorative Coin Act was signed into law. This bill authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to mint five-dollar gold coins, one-dollar silver coins, and half-dollar coins in honor of Boys Town's 100th anniversary. Adorned with designs and sayings that capture the spirit and mission of

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



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Boys Town, these coins can act as good reminders of those who once helped us. I hope they also serve as encouragement to improve our communities and think about those who are less fortunate.

I wish Father Boes continued success going forward. We in the Senate are all rooting for him. Boys Town exemplifies the spirit of America, and it is the prize of the State of Nebraska. I am honored to be its Senator.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

THANKING THE SENATOR FROM NEBRASKA AND THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to thank our colleague from Nebraska and our guest this morning for reminding us of the wonderful story of Boys Town. We were discussing the movie from the late 1930s starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney, as well as learning what has happened to Boys Town since then.

Thank you so much, Senator FISCHER and our guest, for bringing us up to date on the latest on Boys Town.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2199

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2199) to authorize appropriations for border infrastructure construction, to provide conditional resident status to certain aliens, and to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to include grounds of inadmissibility and deportability for alien members of criminal gangs and cartels, and for other purposes.

Mr. McCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

NOMINATION OF JOSEPH BALASH

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in addition to our important work on tax reform and to fund the government, this week the Senate is also continuing our efforts to confirm President Trump's nominees to his administration.

Soon the Senate will consider the nomination of Joseph Balash to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management.

Through his career in both State government and as the Alaska commissioner of natural resources and his service here in the U.S. Senate, Mr. Balash has shown his talent and passion for affordable sources of energy and environmental protection.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources manages one of the largest portfolios of land, water, oil, gas, renewables, timber, and minerals in the world. Mr. Balash's leadership of the department required collaboration with many diverse stakeholders and a dedication to the protection of Alaska's natural beauty. He worked closely with the Interior Department and the commissioner, and he has the skills necessary to fulfill this leadership role at the Department.

As the Assistant Secretary, Mr. Balash will be responsible for many of the Interior Department's critical functions, including the management of all Federal lands and waters, the management of their associated resources, and the appropriate regulation of surface coal mining. I look forward to working with Mr. Balash on many of these issues, especially those important to the coal miners in my home State of Kentucky.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this nomination.

TAX REFORM BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on another matter, yesterday the Senate formally voted to join our colleagues from the House to consider our tax reform bills in a conference committee. It is another important step toward delivering much needed relief to the men, women, and families we represent. Now the committee members will reconcile the differences between the bills. When they finish their work, Members of both Chambers will have the opportunity to pass this tax reform legislation and send it to President Trump.

As I have said before, tax reform represents the single most important thing we can do right now to grow the economy and boost middle-class families. It will also incentivize businesses to bring investment and jobs home and keep them here. We want a tax bill that works for hard-working American families, one that can bring opportunity, help create new jobs, and keep more money in workers' paychecks. That means a typical family of four earning a median income could see a tax cut of approximately \$2,200.

This tax reform plan is our way of helping families get ahead and plan for their future. It has taken a lot of hard work to get to this point, and I wish to thank my Senate colleagues and our friends in the House and in the Trump administration for their efforts to fundamentally rethink our Tax Code.

I look forward to the conference committee's report so we can complete our efforts and deliver relief to those who need it most.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on one final matter, the Senate must act before the end of the week to pass a clean, short-term funding bill to maintain critical operations of the Federal Government. Our colleagues in the House will send us the non-controversial provision soon, and then we will have an opportunity to consider it. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting to pass it. This short-term continuing resolution will provide us with the time we need to complete discussions on a long-term solution. It will also provide certainty to States to continue funding the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Later today, Speaker RYAN, Leader SCHUMER, Leader PELOSI, and I will meet with President Trump to continue discussing an agreement to fund the Federal Government. I look forward to working together with colleagues in a serious, bipartisan way to address a number of the priorities of our Nation in the coming weeks. I hope all Members will join me.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

ISSUES BEFORE CONGRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I first would like to talk today about year-end business.

Congressional negotiators are making good headway on a budget deal that would meet our commitments to our military and also our urgent priorities here at home. I hope this progress continues this week.

Unfortunately, the progress in Congress is in stark contrast to the rhetoric coming from the White House.