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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BILL CASSIDY, a Senator from the State of Louisiana.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, abide with us. When other helpers fail and comfort flees, strengthen our Senators with Your might. Provide them with a perseverance that completes the task, a courage to face every fear, and a fidelity that brings glory to Your Name. Help them to live such exemplary lives that they will infect others with the contagion of love for You and country. Lord, give them the gentleness and symmetry to bring healing to our Nation and world. Whatever they do, may they do it for You, the Author and Finisher of our destinies.

We pray in Your strong 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. HATCH).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, January 8, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BILL CASSIDY, a Sen-

ator from the State of Louisiana, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 1 million Americans and counting will be starting 2018 with more money in their pockets, thanks to tax reform.

Special bonuses are on the way for employees across a wide range of industries. Businesses throughout America are taking advantage of more competitive tax rates and passing the savings along to their workers. As a result, employees at companies from Visa and AT&T to Turning Point Brands in Louisville, KY, are seeing results. For working parents in Kentucky and all across the Nation, these bonuses and other permanent changes will make a big difference in family budgets.

Of course, in just weeks, families will see the benefits of tax reform hit their paychecks. Lower tax rates will mean less money withheld for the IRS and more take-home pay for more hard-working Americans.

I am particularly proud of the way this tax reform will benefit America's farmers and ranchers. Later today, President Trump is delivering the good news at the annual conference of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Like so many States, Kentucky is home to a vibrant farming community. Throughout the legislative process, I heard family farmers loud and clear. They said: We need tax relief. That is what Congress delivered.

Thanks to our once-in-a-generation tax reform law, it will be easier for

farm families around Kentucky and around the country to invest in new capital equipment and recover their costs. According to the Farm Bureau Federation, 93 percent of U.S. farms file taxes through the individual code. They will benefit from the major tax relief we secured for passthrough businesses.

Especially important for farmers, this tax bill doubled the exemption from the death tax. It is the government's final insult to make grieving families visit both the undertaker and the IRS at the same time. Now this burden will fall on fewer American farmers and ranchers.

Thanks to the work of Senator ROBERTS, Senator HATCH, and many others, we passed a tax reform bill that both the American Farm Bureau Federation and the Kentucky Farm Bureau enthusiastically endorse, and now farming families throughout America will reap the benefits.

NOMINATION OF WILLIAM L. CAMPBELL, JR.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, later today the Senate will vote to advance the nomination of William L. Campbell, Jr., to serve as a U.S. district judge for the Middle District of Tennessee.

Mr. Campbell's nomination is not controversial. Like the other three district court nominees before the Senate this week, he is well qualified. They are the kinds of nominees who, until recently, would have sailed quickly and smoothly right through the Senate.

So why will their four nominations consume a week of the Senate's attention? Why do we need to file cloture on each, and then exhaust the full 30 hours of debate? The reason is that Senate Democrats are choosing, for partisan reasons, to make these nominations take as long as possible. Their goal is to waste the Senate's time and prevent the President from promptly filling judicial vacancies.

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



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Mr. President, 2017 was a historic year of partisan obstruction by our Democratic colleagues, even for uncontroversial judges who went on to unanimous or near-unanimous confirmation votes. Our colleagues across the aisle used every possible procedural roadblock to delay and drag their heels.

Now 2018 is, unfortunately, starting off the same way.

Mr. Campbell is a Marine Corps veteran and a well-respected lawyer. His record is not partisan. His nomination was reported out of the Judiciary Committee on a voice vote. I look forward to the Senate confirming him, albeit after our Democratic colleagues waste more of the Senate's time.

I implore our Democratic friends to turn the page on the needless obstruction and permit the Senate to function smoothly so that we can attend to more of the people's business.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on a final matter, in the next 11 days Congress needs to reach an agreement to fund the government.

It is imperative that this agreement provide adequate resources for our men and women in uniform. Last week, leadership on both sides of the aisle expressed hopes of working seriously and collaboratively on a solution that enables our Armed Forces to advance critical missions at home and abroad.

At the same time, our Democratic colleagues persist in the notion that we should increase defense spending only if we increase nondefense spending by the same amount. As we lay the facts on the table, this political talking point simply doesn't hold up.

By now, we all know that the Budget Control Act hit defense spending much harder than it hit domestic spending. Since fiscal year 2013, to be precise, discretionary defense spending has been cut by \$85 billion more than discretionary nondefense spending. This might sound like an abstract distinction, but it has very real, tangible consequences for our national security. These disproportionate cuts have reduced the readiness of American forces to meet and address emerging threats.

Our military leaders have explained this over and over and over again. Just months ago, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dunford, told our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee that over the last decade, "The U.S. military's competitive advantage against potential adversaries is eroding." He cited budgetary instability as a key reason.

At the same hearing, Secretary of Defense Mattis added: "No enemy in the field has done more to harm the readiness of our military than sequestration."

"No enemy," Secretary Mattis said, "in the field has done more to harm the readiness of our military than sequestration."

The men and women we trust to lead our military have made it abundantly clear that the status quo in defense funding, let alone the further instability that would result from our failure to reach an agreement, is handicapping our servicemembers.

In the next week and a half, let's put aside partisan rhetoric and start heeding the warnings of our nonpartisan military leaders. Let's give those who keep us safe the resources they need to do the job.

RESERVATION OF LEADER 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 legislative clerk read the nomination of William L. Campbell, Jr., of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Middle District of Tennessee.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WYDEN. 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.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to mark a milestone no Senator can be proud of and a milestone every Senator should regret. That milestone is, it has now been 100 days since the Congress failed to extend full funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program. The Congress has always looked at this in a bipartisan way. This is for the millions of families, for kids who walk an economic tightrope with their families, the families who balance the rent bill against the fuel bill and the fuel bill against the grocery bill.

I have to say, there was plenty of time in the last Congress to carry out the priorities of the multinational corporations. The people who are well connected, the people who are powerful received permanent, substantial, really massive new tax breaks, and yet the 9

million kids, including 80,000 in my home State who count on CHIP to stay healthy—what they received was a patch. They received something temporary. They received something that didn't resemble the permanent, you-can-count-on-it tax relief the multinational corporations were celebrating at the end of the year. It is a sad statement about the priorities of the Congress at the end of last year and one I hope we will move now in the bipartisan tradition of this program to pass on a permanent basis.

The CHIP program was created in 1997 through a simple idea: No child, regardless of their income, family's status, or geography should go without quality, affordable healthcare. It serves families who make too much to qualify for Medicaid but also don't have access to affordable healthcare through their employer. A lot of these families go back and forth between CHIP and Medicaid, depending on whether a spouse is out of work.

CHIP covers all kinds of essential healthcare for kids from preventive services to dental checkups, to treatment for serious illnesses. For families across the country, that is peace of mind, that is the chance to go to bed at night knowing you aren't going to get crushed by big medical bills in the morning. It means you don't have to have those heartbreaking, right-before-bed conversations about what you are going to do for your sick child, and it doesn't mean you have to just plan on the unexpected emergencies with nowhere to turn. All of that is at risk because of the "negligence" of this Congress, and I use that word specifically.

I talked about the skewed priorities at the end of the year, but right now States are stretching their Children's Health Insurance Program dollars to the breaking point. They are trying to make sure kids stay covered, and what we are faced with is termination notices going out. We have to prevent those termination notices for these families. As I said, Congress put a patch on all this, contrasting this to the permanent relief of the multinationals, and the Congress sent a small amount of money to the States to keep them afloat, but make no mistake about it, it is not going to be long before bedlam sets in, once again, and there are real consequences for children and families.

Now, I also want to note that I have been working closely with Chairman HATCH for months now to get CHIP across the finish line. Chairman HATCH knows what it takes. He created this program with our friend Senator Rockefeller and the late, great Senator Kennedy. They demonstrated that kids' health was an issue that transcends ideological lines, and our country is the better for it today.

Chairman HATCH and I made an agreement in September that extends full funding for 5 years, affirms key protections for kids and their families, and gives States certainty they can