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Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Gracious God, teach us to number our days that we may have hearts of wisdom. Today, guide our lawmakers. Keep their minds clear and clean and uncluttered by cares as they follow Your leading.

Lord, make them aware that they are the recipients of Your unconditional love. Enable them to fill swift hours with mighty deeds that will help keep America strong. May Your Kingdom of love and righteousness come within them, motivating them to contribute worthily to the abiding peace of humanity.

We pray in Your great 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT LEGISLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. First, Mr. President, on an important piece of internal business, workplace harassment is unacceptable anywhere—end of story. The U.S. Congress is certainly no exception. Here, as everywhere, employees must be free to work without fearing that they will be the victims of harassment.

So a consensus emerged among Members in both the House and the Senate that we should do more to hold people accountable, protect staff, and help to prevent harassment in the first place. That is exactly what will happen under the proposal that our colleagues Senator BLUNT and Senator KLOBUCHAR have developed.

These colleagues of ours deserve big thanks. Their thorough, bipartisan collaboration has produced an impressive and comprehensive proposal to reform how Congress handles claims of violations of Federal workplace laws, particularly, instances of harassment. It will help this institution take an important step forward.

Their proposed reform achieves many of the important goals that Members of both parties have put forward in recent months. There was widespread consensus that Members of Congress should reimburse taxpayers for the cost of claims or settlements. This reform achieves that and more. It requires Members to pay for any harassment claims, for any protected class, where the Member has personally engaged in misconduct.

We sought to eliminate obstacles that made it more difficult for employees to file claims. This reform achieves that. It eliminates the mandatory counseling, the mandatory mediation, and the mandatory cooling-off period that current law requires employees to go through before filing a claim of a workplace violation.

We wanted to ensure disclosure when there are settlements or awards for instances of sexual harassment. This reform achieves that and more. It mandates that every instance where a Member is found to have personally committed any type of harassment be publicly reported.

This is an entirely appropriate package of reforms that every Member of this body should be able to support. It builds on the foundation laid by Senator GRASSLEY's landmark Congressional Accountability Act back in 1995.

Our friend from Iowa led the way in making sure that Congress had to live by the workplace laws that it required of others, and it builds on other important steps this institution has recently taken, such as updating and strengthening the anti-harassment training that all Senate employees must complete.

Here is what all this adds up to: a clearer, easier, and more timely process for those who seek to file harassment claims and greater personal accountability and transparency in the event that misconduct occurs.

The Democratic leader and I are grateful to Senator BLUNT and Senator KLOBUCHAR for their hard work in assembling this proposal. It has our enthusiastic support.

VA MISSION BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, now on an unrelated matter, today the Senate will take action to fulfill an important promise. Our Nation's all-volunteer Armed Forces consist of brave men and women who answer the call to serve, often at personal risk. In gratitude for their selfless sacrifice, we promise them the accessible and quality care they have earned when they return home. Veterans of all eras rely on this promise as they carry home the physical and mental reminders of their service, but all too often the VA has fallen short of meeting their needs with facilities that were too far away, lines and waiting lists that were too long, and options for treatment that were too limited.

The shortcomings of the Federal bureaucracy were apparent. Veterans waiting months to see a physician under their VA benefits—let alone dying before receiving treatment—meant that we were clearly falling short of our commitment to them.

Congress had to act. So in 2014 a bipartisan coalition of 91 Senators and 420 Members of the House took a critical first step by passing the Veterans

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



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