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Senate

The Senate met at 10 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.

Eternal God, the Earth belongs to You and everything in it. Thank You for continuing to bless our lives. Give our lawmakers absolute trust in Your faithfulness and power. May the unfolding of Your loving providence in our history inspire them to persevere. Lord, fill them with Your Spirit, guiding their words and helping them to avoid risky rhetoric. Tune their hearts to the frequency of Your inner voice, making them responsible stewards of freedom.

Lord, thank You for blessing the United States of America throughout our history. Continue to unite us in the common cause of justice, righteousness, and truth.

We pray in Your strong 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. COTTON). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, some questioned whether Washington

could ever agree on a replacement for No Child Left Behind. They needn't question any longer. Just consider today's headline from the Associated Press: "Outdated education law up for major makeover in the Senate."

This morning we expect that a new Senate that is back to work will send the Every Student Succeeds Act to the President for his signature. This forward-looking replacement for a broken law would open new opportunities for our kids and put education back in the hands of those who understand their needs best: parents, teachers, States, and school boards.

This bipartisan legislation would strengthen charter schools. This bipartisan legislation would prevent distant bureaucrats from imposing common core. This bipartisan legislation would substitute one-size-fits-all Federal mandates for greater State and local flexibility. In short, it is conservative reform designed to help students succeed, instead of helping Washington grow. It is a significant achievement for our country.

I thank everyone who helped make this moment possible. At the top of the list are two Senators. There is Senator ALEXANDER, a former Education Secretary from Tennessee, a Republican; and there is Senator MURRAY, a former preschool teacher from Washington State, a Democrat. They worked very hard. They worked across the aisle, and they worked in good faith.

Their success in this effort is our country's gain. It is a win for parents, and it is a win for dedicated teachers. Most importantly, it is a win for children because these young Americans deserve the enhanced opportunities the bill would provide.

There is something else we know about Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY about their accomplishment. It is a testament to what a new and more open approach can bring to the legislative process. It gives Senators of both parties more of a say. It gives

Senators of both parties more of a stake. So Senators are more likely to be interested in working together and seeing good ideas through to completion. That is just what we have seen here.

Senator MURRAY said: "I am very proud of the bipartisan work we have done on the Senate floor—debating amendments, taking votes, and making this good bill even better."

Senator ALEXANDER said: "The bill is just one more example that Congress is back to work."

I couldn't agree more. Finding a serious replacement for No Child Left Behind eluded Washington for years. Today it will become another bipartisan achievement for our country.

I urge every colleague to join me in voting to send this forward-looking, conservative reform to the President's desk. Let's help every student by passing a bill NPR calls a "sea change in the federal approach" and the Wall Street Journal hails as "the largest devolution of federal control to the states in a quarter-century."

BIPARTISAN ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the new Congress and the new Senate this year have had a habit this year of turning third rails into bipartisan achievements. You might say we did so on highways and transportation last week. You might say we are doing so on schools and education this week.

We have also overcome significant obstacles to pass important legislation that would protect America's privacy online through the sharing of cyber threat information that would help fight against unfair trade barriers, that would help our military modernize and prepare for future threats, and that would bring hope to victims of deplorable crimes who suffer in the shadows.

But when it comes to the truest of third rails in American politics, some boil that down to just two phrases:

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



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Medicare and Social Security. We all know that positive action will be needed if we care about saving these programs for future generations. Republicans and Democrats are both aware of this inescapable fact. Yet too many politicians have been conditioned to believe that bringing one comma of positive reform to either law is political suicide.

Well, bipartisan majorities in the new Congress voted to change a lot more than just commas in both laws this year. We took bipartisan action on Medicare, reforming a broken payment system that has threatened seniors' care. We took bipartisan action on Social Security's disability component, enacting the most significant reform in a generation. As a result of these bipartisan reforms, we put a permanent end to Congress' annual doc fix drama. We brought reform to a program for disabled Americans that was scheduled to go broke next year. And we broke through on a bipartisan basis—an important psychological barrier that has held back broader positive action for the American people.

The scale of what this new Congress was able to achieve on these issues is noteworthy, but it is important for another reason. It clears a path for future wins for our constituents. That is good news for our country today, it is good news for future generations tomorrow, and it is another example of a Congress that is back to work for the American people and back on their side.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS BILL AND FILIBUSTERS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, today we are taking a long, overdue step in moving beyond the Bush No Child Left Behind law.

The Every Student Succeeds Act will reduce the focus on testing while still ensuring that all students are making progress. This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act also includes new investments for early childhood education—a priority for Democrats.

The senior Senator from Washington, Mrs. MURRAY, and the chairman of the HELP Committee, Senator ALEXANDER, did good work in getting this bill passed. But while we pat ourselves on the back for passing this legislation, we shouldn't forget that we could have done this a long time ago. It was not long after the bill passed that we knew it was full of flaws, and we tried valiantly to change it for a number of years.

Why didn't we change it? Because there were Republican filibusters. We couldn't bring the bill to the floor. In fact, nearly every major bipartisan bill we passed this year could have become

law in years past if Republicans had not blocked them, obstructed them, and filibustered them.

What are we talking about? We are talking about the bill we are going to vote on at 10:45 a.m., the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the so-called doc fix. My friend referred to that, the SGR. For years, because of something the Bush administration had done to fix it on paper to make the budget look good, we could not get past that. It was terrible for Medicare patients and very bad for Medicare physicians. We tried to change it not once, not twice, not three times, but numerous times. Every time we couldn't do it because of Republican obstructionism.

We passed the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act. Why didn't we do it earlier? Because the Republicans filibustered it, blocked it, and obstructed it.

The Department of Homeland Security funding that nearly shut down the government—we tried to do it earlier. We couldn't because of obstruction by Republicans.

The Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, also called the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act—why didn't we do that earlier? Because they wouldn't let us. They filibustered it, they blocked it.

For the Shaheen-Portman energy efficiency bill it was the same thing; the USA FREEDOM Act, the same thing. As to cyber security legislation, my friend comes and boasts about all the good things done, and it includes cyber security. It takes a lot of gall to come here and boast about that. It was filibustered time and again by the Republicans.

My friend also talks about how great the Senate is operating. When he signed up for this job, he said that, as Republicans, they would take all bills through the committee of jurisdiction—absolute falsehood. They have not done that.

What am I talking about? Well, S. 534, the Immigration Rule of Law Act of 2015, went directly to the floor. DHS, Department of Homeland Security appropriations, directly bypassed the committee. For the Keystone Pipeline it was the same thing; Iran nuclear agreement, same thing; vehicle for the Trade Act, same thing; Trade Preferences Extension Act, same thing. H.R. 644, Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act, same thing, went directly to the floor and skipped the committee. Patriot Act extension, same thing—it skipped the committee. Highway bill, same thing—it skipped the committee. Defund Planned Parenthood skipped the committee and came right here. The vehicle for the Iran bill skipped the committee and came directly to the floor. The pain-capable bill, same thing—it skipped the committee and came here. And there are many other instances.

The bills I have talked about, with some exception, were good bills in the last Congress, and they were good bills this Congress. The only difference be-

tween then and now is that Republicans no longer blocked them.

I am not amused. I know that some may think this is amusing, but it is not. It is too serious. When my Republican colleagues take victory laps on legislation they filibustered last Congress, that is not a laughing matter. I say to my Republican friends: You get no credit for passing legislation now that Republicans blocked then. It doesn't work that way. We have not obstructed; we have been constructive. If Republicans are intent on claiming credit for moving forward bills they have blocked in the past, I hope they will change course this coming year and finally start to do something for the middle class.

Where have we done anything for the middle class during the first year of this Congress? I don't see a place. We are halfway through the 114th Congress, and I have seen little hope that they are planning on doing anything in the next few months. Let's see what happens next year.

This Congress so far has been a failure for middle-class Americans. We can change that next year. We can do something about the minimum wage that has been filibustered numerous times by the Republicans. Increasing the minimum wage is good for American workers, businesses, and the economy. Under Senator MURRAY's proposal, 38 million Americans stand to benefit from an increase in the minimum wage. In Nevada, almost 400,000 workers will get a raise. That is almost one-third of our State's workforce.

Next year we can finally address unfair wage disparity that takes money out of American women's paychecks. On average, women make about 77 cents for every dollar their male colleague makes for doing the same work. For women of color, the disparity is even worse. African-American women make 64 cents for every dollar their male colleagues make for doing the same work. Latino women make 53 cents for every dollar doing the same work that a man does. That is really unconscionable. I encourage the Republican leader to take up Senator MIKULSKI's Paycheck Fairness Act, which would help close the wage-gap disparity for American women.

Next year we could pass legislation to ease the burden of student loans, which are so costly. Americans now owe more than \$1 trillion in student loan debt. Student loans are the second largest source of personal debt in the United States—even more than credit cards or auto loans. I hope Republicans will work with us to do something about this next year. Americans with student loans need the help.

These are just a few of the important matters I urge Republicans to undertake in the coming year. There are many things we can do to help the middle class. So instead of telling us how the Senate is working, why not work with Democrats? Instead of telling us how productive this year has been in