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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Dr. Benny Tate, senior pastor of Rock Springs Church in Milner, GA.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our most kind and gracious Heavenly Father, as we bow our heads and hearts before You, we come with a grateful heart. I lift this esteemed body of individuals to Your care and blessing. My prayer is that You will illuminate their understanding because, as Ben Franklin reminded us, You are the Father of lights. I pray for every Member that they would follow the direction of President Abraham Lincoln and be driven to their knees by an overwhelming conviction that they had nowhere else to go. God, give our leaders direction and guidance. I ask You to unify the hearts of the men and women serving in this body, for unity is where You commanded the blessing. May every Member remember the goal is more important than any role, and our Lord teaches us that the greatest of all is the one who serves, and anyone can be great because anyone can serve.

We pray this prayer, respecting all faiths, but we pray this prayer in the Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Until You come, we pray. 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HELLER). The Senator from Georgia.

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I want to take just a moment today to recognize Dr. Benny Tate of Rock Springs Church in Milner, GA, for being here with us to deliver this morning's opening prayer.

Benny is my personal pastor, my dear friend, and inspiration for both my wife and me. He offered us constant prayer and support as I entered this political journey and continues to do so today.

Before I was sworn in to the Senate, we joined Benny on a personal mission trip to Haiti. It was a life-changing trip. We went to a community that had been stricken by the earthquake in 2010. We saw kids who were still sleeping and eating on the ground in tents. Yet we saw hope, and that is hope I will carry with me the rest of my life because of this man, Benny Tate.

Thank you, Brother Benny, for your faith, your life, and your service. We are all honored to have you here today.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

OBAMACARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, here is the headline too many Kentuckians had to wake up to this morning: "Health insurance rate hike requests average 17 percent in [my home State]."

The story noted that these double-digit premium increases continue a national trend of hefty hikes as insurers adapt to a market reshaped by President Obama's signature health care law—in other words, more unaffordable premium increases, thanks to ObamaCare.

It was unfortunate to hear some of ObamaCare's defenders try to pretend

otherwise and blame these rates on something like uncertainty over Kynect's future. As the story notes, "the only company that will offer plans statewide on the exchange next year said the requested rate increase has nothing to do with the end of Kynect." Yesterday I shared stories from Kentuckians who continue to suffer under this law.

Thanks to what we learned last night, I am afraid we will be hearing even more. ObamaCare's defenders need to own up to what their partisan law is doing to the middle class and not waste another moment trying to deflect attention elsewhere. They need to work with us to relieve the pain of ObamaCare and start over with real care.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the men and women who sign up to defend our Nation don't ask for much, but our Nation certainly asks a lot of them. They sacrifice on our behalf every day. They deserve the kind of support that the National Defense Authorization Act before us can provide. It will honor commitments to veterans, servicemembers, and their families. It will authorize raises, support Wounded Warriors, and improve military benefits and health care. We need to pass it. The Democratic leader needs to stop preventing us from doing so.

Yesterday in his opening remarks, he claimed he was holding up the bill because he hadn't had the chance to read it—then talked about a new book he is reading.

Today in his opening remarks he will surely make more excuses for Democrats not to do their jobs—then head to a press conference titled "Do Your Job."

You can't make this stuff up. But it is not funny.

Look, we get it. Democrats want to run TV ads claiming the Senate can't

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



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get anything done. They know that is a really tough sell. They know the only chance to make it work is by slow-walking bills they actually support.

Democrats don't actually want to be on record opposing our troops before Memorial Day, so they support the bill in public then bog it down in private and cover with one embarrassing excuse after the next: We haven't read it. It was written in secret. The dog ate it. It is just embarrassing.

As the chairman of the Armed Services Committee said, "We need to move forward with this legislation. We need to move forward with it now, for the sake of our men and women who are serving and defending this Nation and putting their lives on the line." He is right.

So here is an idea. How about Democrats skip talking about doing their jobs at a press conference and actually do their jobs instead? They can follow the lead of this Republican majority—a majority that continues to do its job—and show how important things can be accomplished for the American people as a result. So no more needless delays, no more embarrassing excuses, and no more blocking benefits for the men and women of our military. Let's work together to get this done. We have already seen what is possible in the Republican-led Senate when we do.

THE REPUBLICAN-LED SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, so much has changed since the American people elected a new Republican majority to get the Senate back to work. Americans have told us to break through the gridlock and get the Senate focused on real solutions again. We have, and we are.

This doesn't mean our colleagues across the aisle will always cooperate; we have certainly seen an unfortunate example of that this particular week. But what is clear is how the underlying fundamentals have changed: Committees are now functioning; legislative processes are now working; we now continue to get important things done for the people who sent us here.

It all started with a simple philosophy: Give Senators and the people they represent more of a say in the legislative process, and they will take more of a stake in the legislative outcome, regardless of party. So we did, and the results have been encouraging. This is how we have been able to transform gridlock into progress and dysfunction into solutions.

To give an example of what I mean, we recently took as many rollcall votes on one bill, the Energy Policy Modernization Act, as the Senate took in all—all—of 2014 under the previous majority. It is remarkable how far we have come in such a short time.

Consider what we were able to achieve for our constituents in 2015 alone. Some said Congress could never break old traditions of short-term fixes and patches and punts, but we repeat-

edly proved them wrong with meaningful and substantial reforms instead.

That is certainly true of the new education reform law we passed. It replaced No Child Left Behind with "the largest devolution of federal control to the states in a quarter-century." It is a hugely important reform that empowers parents and prevents Washington from imposing Common Core. That is a notable conservative achievement.

The same could be said of the decisive action we took to enact permanent tax relief for families and small businesses or to bring an end to a job-killing energy embargo from the 1970s or to place on President Obama's desk a bill that would finally end ObamaCare's cycle of broken promises and pain for the middle class.

We secured pay raises for our troops, help for our veterans, and hope for the victims of human trafficking. We passed a landmark cyber security law that will help safeguard America's personal information. We achieved the most significant transportation solution in years, one that will finally allow us to rebuild roads, bridges, and crumbling infrastructure without raising taxes by a penny.

We got a lot done for the American people in 2015. We are continuing to get a lot done for the American people in 2016.

In just a few months, the Republican-led Senate has passed legislation providing real solutions on a range of issues: Addressing the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic that is ravaging our country with critical, comprehensive legislation; modernizing American energy with the first broad energy bill since the Bush administration; improving airport security and consumer protections with the most pro-passenger, pro-security FAA reauthorization in years; deterring North Korea's growing aggression with comprehensive sanctions; keeping the Internet open and accessible by permanently banning government from taxing your access to the Internet; supporting American manufacturing by reducing tariffs that make it harder for American businesses to compete and to grow; defending American innovation and entrepreneurship protections against the theft of intellectual property; and just this week, combating sexual assault and human trafficking with new protections for victims and enhanced tools for law enforcement.

These are just some of the things we have been able to accomplish the past few months alone. But we are not finished. None of this would have been possible without functioning committees and capable leaders to guide them. Those chairs often choose to focus on ideas where Republicans and Democrats can agree, not just where the two parties disagree, and we have gotten some really important legislation passed as a result.

We have seen some truly notable anecdotes, too, like the fact that the Finance Committee has approved more

bills to date in the 114th Congress "than any single Congress since 1980"; like the fact that we got the appropriations process started this year at the earliest point in the modern budgeting era—in other words, in about 40 years; like the fact that we passed the first of these three appropriations bills at the earliest point in the modern budgeting era as well.

It is good to see the appropriations process finally getting back on track after so many years of dysfunction. It is incredibly important for the Senate, it is definitely healthy for the democratic process, and it will certainly allow us to address a variety of funding issues in a more thoughtful and deliberative way.

Take Zika, for instance. Combating the spread of the Zika virus has been a priority for both parties, so Republicans and Democrats deliberated and forged a compromise in committee. Senators debated that compromise out here on the floor and voted to pass it. Now Members of the Senate and the House are preparing the process of going to conference so we can get this measure down to the President. That is how you get good legislation to the President. That is what is known as doing your job around here.

Of course, it will not be easy to get the appropriations process back on track completely after so many years of dysfunction, but we are committed to doing all we can. We have clearly demonstrated strong and steady progress already, and that is something that benefits both parties. It means more Members get a say. It means more scrutiny is brought to bear on the funds that are spent. It means more regular order and more of a Senate that functions even better for everyone.

I am proud of all we have accomplished in such a short time. We have put the Senate back to work, we have continued to get our jobs done, and that has allowed us to pass important legislation for the American people who, after all, sent us all here.

I thank Senators from both sides who have worked with us to restore this Chamber to a place of higher purpose. I know there is more we can accomplish together, so let's keep working to ensure that we do.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is not necessary to go into great detail about the past, but it is important to talk about the past so we understand what is going on now and what the future holds.

The biggest change coming from the Republican majority is what the Democratic minority has done. We have cooperated. We are not in the business of