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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, a Senator from the State of Connecticut.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, we thank You for the life and legacy of the man called Madiba Nelson Mandela, and for the exemplary footprints he left in the sands of time. Inspired by his great life, may our lawmakers deal fairly and wisely with the great issues of our time.

Lord, help our Senators to remain tethered to a firm faith in You, committing their lives and our country to Your will. May they demonstrate their faith daily, remembering that faith without action is not real. Empower them to work together for the peace and prosperity of America, as they seek spiritual moorings in today's turbulent times.

Lord, help our Senators to remain tethered to a firm faith in You, committing their lives and our country to Your will. May they demonstrate their faith daily, remembering that faith without action is not real. Empower them to work together for the peace and prosperity of America, as they seek spiritual moorings in today's turbulent times.

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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. LEAHY).

The bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 9, 2013.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, a Senator from the State of Connecticut, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MURPHY thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT OF 2013—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 243, S. 1356.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 243, S. 1356, a bill to amend the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to strengthen the United States workforce development system through innovation in, and alignment and improvement of, employment, training, and education programs in the United States, and to promote individual and national economic growth, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in morning business until 4 o'clock this afternoon. At 4 p.m. the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1197, the National Defense Authorization Act. At 5 p.m. the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of Patricia Millett to be U.S. circuit judge for the DC Circuit postcloture. At 5:30 p.m. then, the Senate will vote on confirmation of the Millett nomination.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1774, S. 1775, H.R. 1965, AND H.R. 2728

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I think there are four bills—and the clerk can help both of us—at the desk due for a second reading.

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

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1774) to reauthorize the Undetectable Firearms Act of 1988 for 1 year.

A bill (S. 1775) to improve the sexual assault prevention and response programs and activities of the Department of Defense, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 1965) to streamline and ensure onshore energy permitting, provide for onshore leasing certainty, and give certainty to oil shale development for American energy security, economic development, and job creation, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 2728) to recognize States' authority to regulate oil and gas operations and promote American energy security, development, and job creation.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I object to any further proceedings with respect to these bills en bloc.

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

THE NEXT TWO WEEKS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, welcome back. I hope the Acting President pro tempore and staff and all the other Senators had a wonderful Thanksgiving. It was a very good Thanksgiving for us. We had all of our children and all of our grandchildren, except one; she had to work. She lives in New York now.

This week the U.S. Senate begins a short 2-week work period, and I hope it is only 2 weeks. But it could bleed over the weekend before Christmas. I know I come to the floor and say a lot of times that we are going to have to work weekends, but we may really have to work the next couple weekends. We have had a wonderful 2-week break. It was important for all of us.

REMEMBERING NELSON MANDELA

But before I discuss the business before this body, I mourn—as we all mourn—the loss but I also celebrate the life of South Africa's great emancipator Nelson Mandela. He once said: "Difficulties break some men but make

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



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others." His dedication to peace and justice was forged in the fire of adversity—27 years in prison, among other things.

But while he endured great hardship for the cause of universal suffrage, his capacity for forgiveness was as boundless as his dedication to democracy, freedom, and equality.

He leaves a legacy that is so significant. It will inspire current and future leaders for generations to come.

SCHEDULE

Mr. President, now as to our schedule. This week, as South Africa mourns the founder of its democracy, the Senate must continue its work in our democracy.

I suggest to my colleagues that the Senate, as I have indicated, will work long nights—I think we are going to come in earlier than we normally do—and possibly weekends to complete the workload we have before the holidays.

During this next work period—the one we are now engaged in—we must complete work on the National Defense Authorization Act. It is my understanding that the two bodies, the two committees, have come up with something. I hope we get a message from the House soon, and I hope we can dispose of this very quickly.

We must address the issue of additional sanctions against Iran. We must pass an agriculture jobs conference report. We must ensure seniors on Medicare can keep their doctors by adjusting physician payments. We must consider a large number of nominations. And we must complete a budget agreement that protects our economy and ensures our government can continue the work of the people.

I am not going to talk about each of these individually other than that I think it is so shortsighted what the Republicans are doing regarding the famous SGR or physician payments for Medicare. There is money to take care of this problem—a number of different sources—not the least of which are the overseas contingency funds. We had money set aside for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are being phased out. There is still almost \$1 trillion left. I cannot understand why the Republicans refuse to use that money. No one except the Republicans opposes closing these tax loopholes—and not Republicans around the country. It is only the Republicans in Congress who oppose them, not Republicans around the country. These loopholes are so big you could drive the biggest vehicle in the world through them. But we are where we are.

Despite the costly Republican government shutdown this fall, last week's jobs report proved that the American economy continues to gain steam. Private sector businesses have added more than 8 million jobs over the last 45 consecutive months.

If Republicans had not insisted on shortsighted, draconian cuts that forced layoffs of tens of thousands of teachers, firefighters, and police offi-

cers, the economy would be growing even faster than it is today. The Acting President pro tempore knows—we all know—that we need an infrastructure program. For every \$1 billion we spend as a government on infrastructure—roads, bridges, dams, highways, water and sewer systems—we create almost 50,000 high-paying jobs.

Despite last week's good economic news, Congress can and must do even more to create jobs for the millions of Americans who are still looking for work.

As to unemployment compensation, we need these extended benefits. There are 1.5 million people in America who have been out of work for more than 26 weeks. We must replace the meat-ax cuts that have happened with the sequestration with smart savings, reducing the deficit by closing wasteful tax loopholes, and making job-creating investments that spur economic growth.

As we close out this year, I hope Republicans and Democrats can put aside our differences and work together to produce results for the middle class.

The Acting President pro tempore served in the House. I served in the House. I am fortunate to serve here in the Senate. When I first came to this body, Democrats had to focus on what they thought the foundation of democracy was. Republicans did the same. They thought they knew the right thing to do. But, you know, we could never get what we wanted. Each side could not get what it thought was the way it should be. So what did we do? We worked together and came up with compromises to move legislation forward. Let's get back to where we were. That is what this body needs. So I hope we can put aside our differences and work together like we used to.

It is also time for Republicans to work with us—instead of against us—to make the landmark health reform law more workable.

I remind my Republican colleagues that the Affordable Care Act is the law and has been the law of the land for 4 years, and it was upheld by the Supreme Court.

As Democrats have predicted for months, enrollment in Affordable Care Act exchanges is picking up speed as we approach the New Year. As Americans learn more about the benefits of this law, more and more of them are logging on to shop for affordable, quality insurance through the State and national exchanges. The rollout of the national Affordable Care Act Web site was rocky, to say the least, when it came out.

Congress had to make crucial improvements to other landmark programs, such as Social Security and Medicare, when they were first enacted as well. These big legislative deals can have some wrinkles in them. It does not mean Social Security is bad. It does not mean Medicare is bad. It means they are hard to get started. It is just the same for ObamaCare.

But now, I repeat, many of the major problems with the health care site have

been fixed, hundreds of thousands of Americans are logging on every day to research plans they think could work for them and sign up for insurance they know they need.

States that embraced the Affordable Care Act—such as Kentucky and Washington—have also reported successes with their exchanges. And thanks to the health care law, in a few short weeks no one can ever again be denied insurance just because they have a pre-existing condition—because they are a cancer survivor, because they live with diabetes, because they had acne growing up or because they are a woman.

Because of this landmark law, insurance companies can no longer cancel your policy when you get sick, charge you more, I repeat, because you are a woman, or set an arbitrary limit on the care you receive.

Millions of seniors have saved billions of dollars on medicine because of the Affordable Care Act. Why? Because it closed the gap in prescription drug coverage, the so-called doughnut hole.

Millions of young people have stayed on their parents' health plans. And 17 million Americans will qualify for tax credits to purchase the coverage they need and the coverage they deserve.

There are still problems with the Affordable Care Act and ways we can make it better if we work together. But we cannot improve the law without help from some reasonable Republicans. It time for my Republican colleagues to give up their fantasy of repealing a law that is already benefiting tens of millions of Americans and start working with us to make the Affordable Care Act succeed instead.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Mr. REID. Mr. President, will the Chair announce the business of the day.

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 4 o'clock p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, 75 years ago President Roosevelt signed the Fair Labor Standards Act written, in