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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:

Holy God, You make the clouds Your chariot and walk upon the wind. We see Your works in the rising of the Sun and in its setting. For the beauty of the Earth and the glory of the skies, we give You praise.

Today, make our lawmakers heirs of peace, demonstrating that they are Your children as they strive to do Your work on Earth. May they take pleasure in doing Your will, knowing that by so doing they are fulfilling Your purposes in our world.

Lord, You are never far from us but often we are far from You, so show us Your ways and teach us your paths. Thank You that Your mercy is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who come to You with reverence. May Your glory endure forever.

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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2015—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to H.R. 240.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows: Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 5, H.R. 240, a bill making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes.

OBAMACARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, many Americans have already started the process of filling out their tax returns. It is a stressful time of year, but thanks to ObamaCare many are sure to find it even more stressful. Part of this is because of ObamaCare's \$1 trillion-plus in tax increases.

If you have health insurance ObamaCare has a tax for that. If you don't have health insurance, ObamaCare has a tax for that too. Whether government bureaucrats deem your coverage generous or not generous enough, ObamaCare has a tax for you.

Some of these taxes are paid by consumers directly. Others are passed along in the form of higher premiums, increased costs, and lost opportunities, but many fall on the shoulders of the middle class.

There is more to the issue, too, because ObamaCare has done what many thought impossible, it has made a mind-numbingly complex Tax Code even more so.

For the first time, the government will be asking on our tax returns if we had health insurance for every month of last year. If someone didn't—well, you guessed it—ObamaCare has a tax for that, too, but this is only a portion of the cost and complexity ObamaCare threatens to impose on millions this tax season.

This is how one health law expert put it:

It will be very easy to find people who are unhappy with [ObamaCare's] . . . new tax obligations—people who have to pay a penalty, who have to wait forever to get through to somebody at the I.R.S. or have to pay back a lot of money because of overpayments of premium tax credits.

This is from an expert who supports ObamaCare.

The truth is ObamaCare is a law that just keeps on giving, giving headaches to the middle class. It meant millions of cancellation notices, it meant higher costs for many, and now this.

Remember, too, the IRS, the same agency charged with processing our tax returns, is now in charge of implementing vast sections of ObamaCare. The same agency that spent so much time trying to silence free speech—the same agency that awarded bonuses to employees who owed back taxes—is an agency charged with enforcing ObamaCare's web of complexity.

Americans are right to question the IRS's competence to handle so much sensitive information. We just received another reminder of that recently.

One of the Obama administration's own inspectors general released a damning report of this troubled agency. The report found that the IRS recently rehired hundreds of individuals who had left the agency under clouds of misconduct.

It took back individuals who had engaged in sexual harassment, criminal misconduct, and fraud and on at least one occasion ignored case file notes that warned "Do not rehire."

The tax collector for America even rehired people who willfully failed to file their tax returns.

I know the chairman of the Finance Committee plans to dig into issues such as these. He wants answers. We all do. The American people deserve them. They are tired of seeing a government that has lost focus on them, and they are tired of enduring ObamaCare's growing list of failed promises.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NECESSARY ABSENCE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am not going to be able to be here the rest of the week. More than likely I have a personal matter I have to deal with.

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



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TRIBUTE TO KATHIE ALVAREZ

Mr. President, I wish to take a minute to talk about somebody whom I have worked with for 30 years in the Senate, and that is Kathie Alvarez, who has done such a great job of calculating our votes, tabulating our votes, and just being somebody who is always here.

We have had a great relationship. I know nothing about her politics. I just know something about her personality, which is warm. She has a great sense of humor, and I am going to miss her a great deal.

I wish her the very best. She has now worked in the Senate for some 30 years. For everyone who has had any dealings with her, which is everyone serving in the Senate, I am sure their experiences have been just like mine, a very pleasant experience.

Again, I wish her the very best in the future, whatever that might be, and someday if she needs a letter of recommendation or something, I would be happy to give her one.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. President, during the past 6 years of the Obama administration there have been 12 million jobs created. Remember when President Obama took office—because of the Bush administration and their activities—we were losing 800,000 jobs a month. So I think it speaks well of what has taken place over the past 6 years to be able to talk about creating 12 million private sector jobs. Not everyone has benefited from these jobs, but a lot of people have.

We in Nevada wish we were doing much better, but we are doing much better than we were. In fact, in Nevada the unemployment rate fell to its lowest level since 2008 last month, but these are private sector jobs. If we had just a little bit of help with public sector jobs, we would be back to the Clinton years. The economy would be on fire.

The Environment and Public Works Committee is the "Environment and Public Works" Committee. The senior Senator from Oklahoma has been one of the leaders on that committee for a long time. He and I disagree greatly with what he does and what he believes dealing with the environment part of that committee.

But we have significant agreement on the other part of that committee, the public sector—environment and public works. He has been out front talking about the need to do something with the highway bill, to create these jobs which are good for the economy.

I know he and Senator BOXER are working to do something with a new highway bill, and I am behind them. I hope they can work something out. It would be so important if we could do something to help the public sector, and no place is better to go than to do something with infrastructure.

We have a \$3 trillion deficit with infrastructure in this country: bridges collapsing, bridges in a state of disrepair, and of course highways. Most

highways in America get a C-minus grade at best. So there are a lot of things we can do to help the economy and do something to take all of the pressure off the private sector.

Unemployment is down 5.7 percent. The stock market, all three of them, are at alltime highs. Manufacturing is doing quite well.

The automobile industry—we struggled when the great General Motors was going bankrupt, Chrysler was going bankrupt, and Ford was hanging on. We stepped forward and said we have to do something about saving one of America's great industries; and we did that.

Quite frankly, we received so much criticism from the Republicans. They were willing to let the automobile sector go bankrupt. We started Cash for Clunkers, we did all kinds of things, and now these companies are thriving and rightfully so.

The automobile industry has rebounded, and that is an understatement. A number of economies are on the right track. I state, for the second time this morning, does that mean everyone has benefited? The answer is no, but a lot of us have benefited.

But throughout all of this, in America—this great country of ours—the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, the middle class is being squeezed, and that we have to recognize.

Let's talk about the economy, 12 million private sector jobs. Could we do better? The answer is yes. It would have been great had we not been thwarted, stopped because of a number of filibusters. We would have a minimum wage for the entire country. We weren't able to get that done. That would be great for the middle class.

It would be good if we could do something about the largest debt America has. It is not credit cards, it is student loan debt. I have admiration for the senior Senator from Illinois as to what he has done about student debt. He has spoken out that some of the things going on in our country dealing with education are absolutely wrong. But one thing that is wrong is we are placing a burden on these young men and women who are going to college and their families.

There are many things we should have done that we didn't do to help the middle class, including equal pay for equal work, but that didn't happen. We need to look at what has happened with the Republicans dealing with the economy. They are doing things that are not helping.

Look at the Politico paper today. They talk about what the Republicans are doing with these riders on the money to fund Homeland Security. At a bare minimum that would increase the debt some \$30 billion.

We can say that for each DREAMer—there is about 600,000 of them—the Republicans want to deport every one of these DREAMers. The average cost of deporting these people is \$10,000 each.

Do the math—\$10,000 times 600,000, that would all go toward increasing the debt.

So shutting down the Department of Homeland Security is where we are headed, and it is such a shame—or having a continuing resolution. Each of these would be a disaster for our economy. If Republicans refuse to fund Homeland Security, tens of thousands of employees that Secretary Johnson is in charge of would have to be furloughed. He says up to 30,000. Others would be ordered to come to work and not be paid.

The Republicans are saying, well, we may not close down. We may fund it, but we may do it at last year's levels, which would be a disaster for the States. There are programs Secretary Johnson funds that are so important to States: Terrorism centers; there is a great big one in Arizona that is waiting to be funded. If we have a CR, a continuing resolution, it will not be funded. We have programs relating to K9 units within police departments that are so important to local governments, State governments, and they would not be funded.

Secretary Johnson laid out on all the TV shows this past weekend about what would happen if we didn't fund the Department of Homeland Security or what would happen if we had to go with a continuing resolution.

SAFER grants, even with firefighters, are so tremendously important for States such as Nevada and around the rest of the country.

So, my Republican colleagues, who now have a huge majority here in Congress, why don't you work to improve the economy, not hurt the economy? Let's pass a clean bill and send it to the President. America deserves a safe homeland. Even conservative newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal criticized the Republicans yesterday about what they are doing with homeland security and what they failed to do with immigration. They have been so critical of the Republicans. The Republicans have a huge majority, and as the Wall Street Journal said yesterday, why don't they use it to the advantage of the American people, which they haven't done.

Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the first hour equally divided, and with the Democrats controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The assistant Democratic leader.