The Senate met at 12 noon 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.
Our Father in Heaven, we sing of Your steadfast love and proclaim Your faithfulness to all generations. Make us one Nation, truly wise, with righteousness exalting us in due season.

Today, inspire our lawmakers to walk in the light of Your countenance. Abide with them so that Your wisdom will influence each decision they make. Lord, keep them from evil so that they will not be brought to grief, enabling them to avoid the pitfalls that lead to ruin. Empower them to glorify You in all they say and do as You fill their hearts with thankful praise. May they never fail to acknowledge their total dependence upon You.

We pray in Your Holy 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.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED
Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 175, H.R. 2810.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.
Only then will Senators have the opportunity to offer additional ideas on healthcare.

Inaction will do nothing to solve ObamaCare’s problems or bring relief to those who need it. In fact, it will make things worse for our constituents all across the country.

I wish to reiterate what the President said yesterday:

Any senator who votes against starting debate is telling America that you are [just] fine with the ObamaCare nightmare. . . . That’s a position that even Democrats have condemned. Remember President Clinton called ObamaCare “the craziest thing in the world” and a Democratic Governor said it’s “no longer affordable.”

You won’t hear me say this often, but they are right.

I hope colleagues will consider ObamaCare’s history of failures—the unaffordable costs, the scarce choices, the burden on middle-class families—as they cast their vote this afternoon. I urge them to remember the families who are hurting under this collapsing law.

Numerous Kentuckians, like so many others across the Nation, have conveyed their heartbreaking stories with me on the telephone calls, meetings, and dozen of healthcare forums all across Kentucky. These families are suffering under ObamaCare. They need relief. I will be thinking about them as I vote to proceed to the bill today. I know for many other colleagues will do the same.

Our constituents are hurting under ObamaCare. They are counting on us to do the right thing right now.

We can do better than ObamaCare. We have a responsibility to the American people. Today’s vote to begin debate is the first step, and we should take it.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following my remarks, the Democratic leader be recognized to use his leader time for up to 20 minutes; and following his remarks, the Senator from Nebraska, Mrs. FISCHER, be recognized to suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in a few short hours, we will vote on the motion to proceed to the House Republican healthcare bill. I will have more to say on the matter prior to the vote.

At the moment, no one knows the plan that is being cooked up in the Republican leader’s office, but it seems to be the same as always—however, it takes to pass anything, no matter how small, to get the House and Senate Republicans into a conference on healthcare.

Surprisingly, I have heard that my friend, the junior Senator from Kentucky, will vote yes on the motion to proceed. He announced it himself. It is true he will likely get a vote on the motion to repeal without replace, but surely he knows that will fail. Why then would the junior Senator from Kentucky—a man who has preached the repeal of the Affordable Care Act root and branch, a man who proselytized that Republicans should stop at nothing short of full repeal—why would the junior Senator from Kentucky vote to proceed knowing he will not get what he wants? It is because, I believe, he and some of the others in this body know that if the Senate manages to pass something to get to conference in the House, the likely compromise is either a full repeal of the Affordable Care Act or something close to it. It will certainly mean drastic cuts in Medicaid, huge tax breaks for the rich, no healthcare for those with preexisting conditions, and millions losing healthcare, particularly in our poorer and more brutal States. That is the only thing our Republicans have been able to agree on.

The hard-right Freedom Caucus in the House would never accept a Republican bill that only repeals a few regulations in the ACA but leaves much of it in place. No, they want full repeal, and, at minimum, deep cuts to Medicaid, huge tax breaks for the wealthy, and marijuana legalized in this Nation losing their healthcare.

To my Republican friends who have repeatedly said that full repeal without replace would be a disaster and to my Republican friends who have opposed the deep and drastic cuts to Medicaid, I say: Don’t be fooled by this ruse. A vote in favor of the motion to proceed will mean deep cuts to Medicaid, maybe even deeper than in the House bill. It will mean people with preexisting conditions will be left high and dry. It will mean huge tax breaks for the wealthiest of Americans. It will mean millions will lose their coverage. So with all the complaining, why are we here at this late moment? Because even the House bill was too drastic for many of the Members here, and it is now being ignored on this motion to proceed, and because we all know the ruse that is going on. The ruse is this: Send it back to the House; then, we will see what we send. We will know what they will send. We may not know every detail. It will either be full repeal without replace or something far too close to that, and all of the work and all of the anguish that so many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have shown in the last several weeks will be wasted because they know darn well what is going to happen when there is a conference.

Mr. President, in recent days, President Trump has gone out of his way to undermine his own Attorney General, his first supporter—what has been reported to be his best friend in the Senate. He has tweeted scathing criticism of Attorney General Sessions and chided him publicly for recusing himself from the Russia investigation and several other perceived failures, in the eyes of the President.

We should all take a moment to think of how shocking these comments are on a human basis. This is the first person who stuck his neck out for Donald Trump and who was with him through thick and thin. Now, even if the President has disagreements with him—which I think are ill-founded and self-centered and wrong—you don’t ridicule him in public—someone who is your closest friend. That speaks to character.

But I would like to speak to the major issue before us, which is related. It is clear that President Trump is trying to bully his own Attorney General out of office. How can anyone draw a different conclusion? If President Trump had serious criticisms of his Attorney General, why not talk to him in person? Why air his grievances so publicly? He wants him out. Here is the disturbing part. Many Americans are wondering if the President is trying to pry the Attorney General off of the Russia investigation.

First, let me state for the record now, before this scheme gains wings, that Democrats will never go along with the recess appointment if that situation arises. We have some tools in our toolbox to obstruct. We are ready to use every single one of them at any time, day or night. It is so vital to the future of the Republic.
Second, I cannot imagine that my friends on the Republican side, particularly in the Republican leadership—my friend the majority leader, who I have great respect for, and Speaker RYAN—would be complicit in creating a constitutional crisis. They must work with us and not open the door to a constitutional crisis during the August recess.

**SANCTIONS BILL**

Mr. President, on one last item, I know there is a lot going on today, but I just want to mention one item from the House of Representatives. Later, the House is going to take up and, hopefully, pass with near unanimity a sanctions bill that includes strong sanctions against Russia, Iran, and North Korea. It is critical that the Senate act promptly on this legislation.

I will work with the majority leader, as I have in recent weeks, to ensure its swift passage so we can get it to the President’s desk before we leave for recess.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KENNEDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

**RECESS**

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess until 2:15 p.m. today for the weekly conference meetings.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:32 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. PORTMAN).

**NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued**

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 7 years ago, Democrats imposed Obamacare on our country. They said that costs would go down. Costs skyrocketed. They said that choice would improve. Choice plummeted. Now, Obamacare’s years-long lurch toward total collapse is nearing a seemingly inevitable conclusion, and it will hurt even more Americans on the way down.

This my friends, is the Obamacare status quo. This is the status quo. We have had to accept it for a long time.

The American people elected a House with a vision of a better way on healthcare. Then they elected a Senate. Then they elected a President.

Now, having been given the responsibility to govern, we have a duty to act. The President is ready with his pen. The House has passed legislation. Today, it is the Senate’s turn. That starts with a vote that we will take momentarily. The critical first step in that process is the motion to proceed. It is the vote that determines whether this debate can proceed at all, whether we even take up the four straight elections in which this was a huge commitment to the American people. It is the vote that determines whether the Senators of both parties can offer their amendments and ideas on healthcare.

I told the people of my State, over this period, that I would vote to move beyond Obamacare, and that is what I am going to do today by voting yes. I ask all of my colleagues to join me in doing so. We have shown that it is possible to put legislation on the President’s desk that moves us beyond Obamacare and its years of failure. We did that 2 years ago. President Obama vetoed what we passed before. President Trump will sign what Congress passes this time.

I thank the President and the administration for all they have done on this issue already. They have worked with us every step of the way, and they, like us, know the consequences of failing to act.

Look, we cannot let this moment slip by. We cannot let it slip by. We have